

Identity and Community Versus Non-Place

By

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**A document presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
of Doctor of Philosophy**

School of Visual and Performing Arts

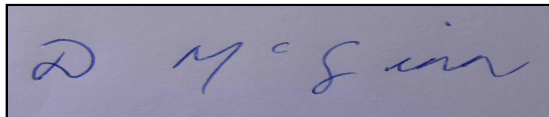
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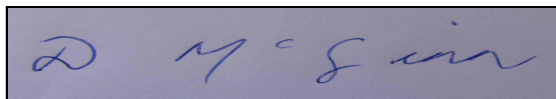
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ABSTRACT

Identity and Community Versus Non-Place, is a PhD submission of sculptural and digital photographic works. I have approached this thesis as both an artist and an archivist. I focused on two suburban icons for this body of work: the hip and valley suburban home and the caravan. I have endeavoured to visualize the impact change is bringing to the Australian coastal landscape by creating works that comment on the effects of urban development – particularly on my local region – and by digital photography, documenting change as it occurs.

Underpinning the thesis is my long-standing relationship with the Victorian Bellarine region. My personal links to the Bellarine region and my understanding of the surrounding region provided an insightful background to the processes of change which are taking place in the local environment. My research investigates the rapid transformation of coastal townships caused by regional suburban development. My work explores what it is that defines place (beyond its physical characteristics), the similarities and differences between a ‘type’ of place (in this case, coastal regions), and how established communities may retain a sense of place despite the threat posed by ubiquitous, characterless housing developments (which I term ‘non-places’).

A primary aim of my research is to have provided a clear contextualisation and an understanding of the importance of location. It explores the significance of Australian coastal regions and our changing relationship with these locations as they become increasingly urbanised. On a sociological level, the differences between middle-class and working-class Australian culture are visually explored. This is particularly evident in the isolation of the traditional residents from the expensive land developments, which are attracting external residents and creating an economically segregated community. This in turn raises the issue of identity, its personal and communal importance and its potential loss as we become increasingly urbanised.

This research project has been achieved through the development and subsequent culmination of a body of sculptural installations that provoke discussion, concerning interesting social polarities such as tradition/innovation, subsistence/affluence, past/present and permanence/change.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For Kristine, Finn, Molly and Angus.

I would like to thank Emeritus Professor Vincent McGrath, Professor Marie Sierra and Dr. Deborah Malor for their constant support, advice and direction.

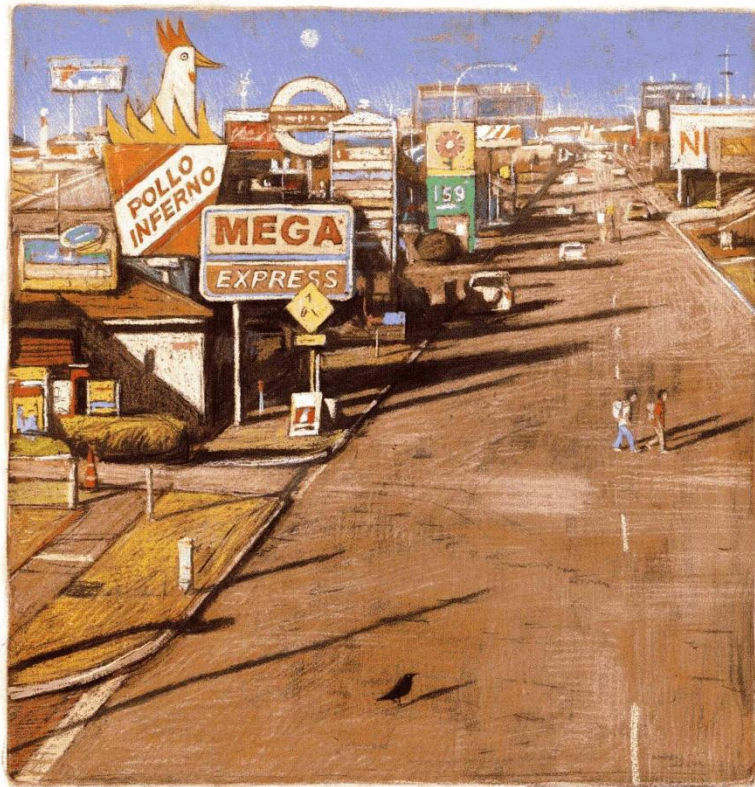
In particular I express my gratitude to Dr. Christopher Headley who has been there since the beginning of this journey.

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INTRODUCTION



1. Shaun Tan, 'Our Expedition'

Tales From Outer Suburbia, 2008

The novelty of our expedition was wearing thin, but not because our feet hurt and we were constantly blaming each other for the forgotten sunscreen. There was some other thing that we could not clearly explain. The further we ventured, the more, everything looked the same, as if each new street, park or shopping mall was simply another version of our own, made from the same giant assembly kit. Only the names were different.¹

¹ Shaun Tan, *Tales From Outer Suburbia: Our Expedition*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, NSW 2008.

Coastal and maritime environments are my home territory. I have a lifelong fascination with coastal habitation and culture. My research endeavours to investigate relationships and associations within this specific and designated region. In particular, the coastal beaches and bays of the Bellarine Peninsula are where I grew up. The Peninsula has always been and still is the major setting that has framed much of my life. Rites of passage from childhood, adolescence and adulthood are all inextricably interwoven into most of my formative and lasting impressions. The seduction of the beach as a backdrop and catalyst for inspiration and theme is central to my research. I began by mapping the Bellarine region out in a grid, and researching local history, the stories, the channel markers and the shifting populations as well as by looking at other artists doing the same kind of thing.

Initially, my research interest was to identify alternative definitions of the sea and coastal regions. To some it is a place of work, to others it is a place of recreation. The artist Ian Hamilton-Finlay viewed the sea as an entity that defines and differentiates people from each other. He believes that the difference between land and sea is one of the biggest differences in the world. Physically from space it is the big visible difference...

...Amongst people too, a big division can still be felt between those who know the sea – and those who know it only as a supplier of seashores and sea views, and beyond that, a place where there are worse troubles and plenty more fish.²

My home region's boundaries are defined not only by geographical criteria but also by social connections, and both historic and folkloric modes of identification. It is the stories behind the names that I find fascinating and they are often related to a sense of propriety and ownership. An example: Having grown up in and around Geelong I have observed that it is common vernacular parlance to hear the majority of Geelong people refer to the Ford Motor

² Ian Hamilton-Finlay, Maritime Works, Catalogue to accompany an exhibition held at Tate St Ives, 2002.

Company as 'Fords'. Thus, integral to this research is the exploration of 'area specific' folklore. A direct example from my initial research of this folkloric mode of identification is the Coles Channel marker. This marker designates the western entrance to Swan Bay from Port Phillip Heads. If you are a local from Queenscliff it is called 'The White Lady', and if you head into the bay and up to St Leonards, the people there refer to it as the 'Coles Channel Marker'. They have their own 'White Lady'. However, the coastal communities of Queenscliff and Point Lonsdale were a catalyst to this thesis. In these two places I have worked as carpenter, surfed and fished. In this capacity I got to meet and know a diverse range of people, from artists and tradesmen to fishermen, sea captains and pilots. These people's 'vocational passions' forcefully engage life's fundamental aspects of family, politics, sexuality, work, nature and religion. Phenomenological attributes such as these broker a direct encounter with the idea of Identity and Community versus Non-Place.

In the context of this investigation it is interesting to note that, historically, Australia's interior until quite recently was thought of as the nation's heartland. Yet by far, the majority of Australians now live in our harbour and bay side cities and on the coastal fringes. This growing density of people has defined the coastal regions as a peripheral new 'heartland'. Bernard Salt in his book *The Big Picture* cites statistical data to verify this claim:

The number of people living on the outermost edge of our continent at June 1976 was 4.4 million. This geographic strip has added 2.5 million people over a 24 year time frame, and over the twelve months to June 2000 the increase was 94,323 or 1.4 per cent.³

³ Bernard Salt, *The Big Shift*, Hardi Grant Books, South Yarra, Victoria, 2004.

It is one that embraces the sea and is indeed ‘coast-centric’. Consequently, it is timely now to explore what is happening on various home territories. If it is simply a matter of occupation, what will be the lasting impact upon the landscape? An example, even though Peter Carey’s novel *Illywhacker*, set in the early 1900s, is a fictional account of Geelong’s view of itself and its coastal surrounds, the context of the novel provides a perfect example of how we now embrace what we once shunned as a legitimate sense of place.

I can remember few days when Corio Bay looked really beautiful ... even when the summer sun shone upon it, when one would expect to recall diamonds of light dancing on an azure field, the water appeared bleak and flat, like a paddock too long over-grazed. This of course, is why the city fathers turned their back upon it and placed vast eyeless wool stores on its shores.⁴

The wool stores are still there, they now house a multi-storey shopping plaza car park. The facade of the shopping plaza, only a decade or so old, also has turned its back on Corio Bay. However, in more recent times Geelong has embraced Corio Bay as its most endearing feature and is proud to be known as the ‘Gateway to the Surf Coast’. Mark Stoner’s large sculptural installation *North* sits proudly in the midst of a vigorous and revitalised Bay City environment. The conclusion to the Draft Waterfront Coastal Action Plan (CAP) states:

This five year review has found that the Waterfront Geelong CAP 1998 has been highly successful in facilitating significant investment to achieve its vision of a vibrant and cosmopolitan area, with development complementing the

⁴ Peter Carey, *Illywhacker*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1985, p. 78.

unique character of the waterfront and providing for water-based activities.⁵



2. Mark Stoner

North, 1998

Geelong city precinct Corio Bay

Throughout the process of documentation of this research I have been making visual art peregrinations and traverses of Tasmanian and Victorian coastal sites to create a backdrop of cultural and sociological intersections and parallels, which would inform and develop a clear direction for my research. It is important to traverse someone else's 'home territory', and get the feel of the

⁵ Liz Johnstone, Chair, Central Coastal Board, Draft Waterfront Geelong Coastal Action Plan, 1998 – Review Report 2004, www.ccb.vic.gov.au/waterfrontgeelong/. [Accessed 24 August 2010].

place from a third person's perspective. Tasmania's northern coastal regions share similar ecological, industrial and social connections to my own home territory of Geelong and the Bellarine Peninsula. Both regions have a large city, Geelong and Launceston being major service centres. Both have maritime, education and entertainment industries. In particular, both cities also have mineral and manufacturing bases. The central themes for my sculptures utilise the parallels and distinctions between these two regions, their sense of community and identity, as opposed to non-place.

For the purposes of this investigation, the term 'non-place' is used to define the new suburbs as places of transition, in that they are half built and only partially established. They are the new suburbs on the periphery of our coast as well as on the edges of our cities and along the arterial routes that speed from the urban into the rural. These are the dormitory places whose surfaces are yet to bear the markings of time, and memory is yet to cling. Their purpose so far is to disperse people by means of a vehicle.

The major subtext to my thesis deals with issues of identity, its personal and communal importance, and its potential loss as the urban sprawl engulfs our coastal regions. Theoretical areas such as the exploration of sociological and environmental aspects of suburban life have formed the nexus of the research. For most of us, the built environment of the suburbs is the backdrop to our lives. But as cities grow, they begin to resemble one another, becoming an ever-expanding mass. What does this do to our sense of place, and to our sense of ourselves? It is my intention to argue that to live in the new suburbs one must assume the position of an anonymous stranger. Furthermore, visually, the suburbs are a triumph of ugliness!

The suburban - stud frame, hip and valley - home, found in residential developments, symbolises the type of change that is particularly prevalent in coastal areas. My digital photographs capture the manner in which these new 'communities' are marketed to potential residents through advertising boards that promise a particular lifestyle that is often at odds with the existing

community. Informing the work is the issue of identity, its personal and communal importance and its potential loss as urban sprawl engulfs coastal regions.

The caravan is a symbol of the Australian annual holiday and represents the translocation of the suburban lifestyle to regional centres. For me, ‘the new mobile holiday home’ reflects affluence. This perception changes as the vehicle ages until it becomes a poor quality permanent home for the economically dispossessed. Now derelict or abandoned, the caravans in my digital photographs and sculptural installations represent the hundreds of thousands of people who live in caravan parks across Australia. This temporary – or often long-term – form of accommodation is representative of people who live one step away from homelessness.

The ‘new dream home’ and the caravan are emblematic of the Australian search for place and identity.

As already indicated, at the outset my work had a maritime concern. Living by the sea, working by the sea, using the leisure-time opportunities of the sea-shore and the changing sense of place of my particular region formed the main focus. My interests also encompassed bio-regionalism. One aspect of my investigation could be described as ‘translating symbols of the sea’ – lighthouses, buoys, and such other markers. I researched ‘folk’ methods of identification and illustrated this interest with reference to placenames, which have meaning to locals only, with some places having different names depending on where you come from. This background formed a theoretical framework for the research, opening the possibility of using art as a vehicle for archival work, and the beautifying of a region threatened by change.

The resultant imagery can be seen in part as a record of change, but rather than recording the past, it seeks to create objects which both, represent what has been lost but also replaces it symbolically with works of art with their own visual integrity. These new works have strong visual links with location.

My preliminary research developed an initial body of work which used found objects, processes of visual documentation and a commitment to the worth of traditional crafts, to build a series of symbolic references to change. My more recent works revealed a shift from the sea to the sea-side and a particular interest in the gated enclaves of the new suburbia and the place of the caravan in Australian culture.

Over the past decade there has been a 'quantum explosion' of coastal subdivisions and regional suburban developments (refer to Appendix 1).⁶ Many Australian coastal townships are undergoing rapid and radical transformations. Identification and recording of visual change that has the potential to undermine the empathetic relationship communities have developed historically with their chosen coastal regions, is a primary research focus.

I have explored the significance of place to see what makes it special and not merely space. What is it that makes this place what it is, as opposed to another place? It is an age old and taxing philosophical question. I am interested in place as a living organism that can be either a place of conflict and unrest or alternatively the host that binds communities together. Carmel Wallace in her thesis: 'Developing a Relationship with Place: Art in the Context of Bioregional Theory',⁷ and Terry Davies, in his thesis: 'Bioregionalism: Area-Specific Art and the Relocated Artist',⁸ have both conceptualised this living involvement of specific places as belonging to 'Bioregionalism'. Both argue that one of the basic tenets of bioregionalism is the development of a relationship with place. I adopt Davies' definition of 'Bioregional Art' as being one where the artist is investigating his or her relationship and

⁶ Bernard Salt, op cit, p. 65.

⁷ Carmel Wallace, 'Developing a Relationship with Place: Art in the Context of Bioregional Theory and Practice', PhD thesis in Deakin University, Geelong, 1998.

⁸ Terry Davies, 'Bioregionalism: Area-Specific Art And The Relocated Artist', PhD thesis in Gippsland Centre for Art & Design, Faculty of Art & Design, Monash University, 2003.

associations within a specific environment, within a designated geographical locale or place. I believe his approach fits with my research direction.

...defining a home areas' boundary...and ...it is not solely reliant on geographic criteria, but also on historic and folkloric modes of identification.⁹

In a bioregional context, an aspect of Davies' research addressed the folklore of small coastal communities in South Australia and Wales (UK) and Wallace's - that of Portland, Victoria. With regard to my own research within and around Queenscliff and Point Lonsdale, I am keen to ascertain whether or not a backdrop of bioregional consciousness is necessary to fully inform my artwork.

In my time as a builder working in the two townships of Queenscliff and Point Lonsdale my direct observation has led me to conclude that these townships are fast losing their area-specificity. I do not believe they are unique anymore. They may provide an example of a ubiquitous, pervasive and relentless encroachment of suburbia into what were, up until now, self-contained villages and hamlets. They offer an example of how the physical space between town and country is diminishing.

My art work is intended to actively participate in and to contribute to, a culture that is unstoppable. For the purpose of this exegesis Bernard Salt, in his book *The Big Shift Who We Are and Where We Are Headed* ¹⁰ aptly defines 'culture' as existing in three parts: 19th century bush, 20th century suburban and thirdly the culture of the beach.¹¹ He argues that this third Australian culture is ascendant . . . it will define a new demographic concentration of Australians during the early 21st century, as it continues to muscle its way into

⁹ *ibid*, p. 12.

¹⁰ Bernard Salt, *op cit*, p. xvi

¹¹ *ibid*.

the 'Australian way'.¹² I will argue that contemporary suburban culture is threatening the regional distinctiveness of the culture of the beach.

The suburbs provide a curious paradox: a world is created where some things are very ugly and some sociological aspects are very beautiful, like jewels. It has become increasingly difficult to spot the 'jewels', as monotony reigns supreme. Is there really anything especially different between a suburb by the bay or on the coast or one at Bannockburn or Bendigo? Should the suburbs be condemned or celebrated? In the words of Howard Arkley: '...It's where ninety five percent of Australians actually live.'¹³ Whilst the research may appear to be an indictment of the 'terrible world' we live in, in the end I argue for a more hopeful vision. My hopeful vision perceives the best suburban environment as one crafted for children, families and the development of social intercourse and play. The suburbs can be a place of enormous potential.

Chapter outline

Chapter One discusses in detail the origin and realisation of my artworks; however, the artworks are introduced and explained throughout the exegesis.

Chapter Two looks at local history, anecdotal stories, and the shift in population as suburbia unfolds into the Bellarine region. The chapter investigates historical and contemporary sociological relationships and associations within this specific and designated region.

Chapter Three investigates the culture and politics of the new suburbs and how this imposes direct consequences upon our coastal communities and villages. On the national level, this chapter analyses the impact of political imperatives on the suburbs, and questions what is truly sustainable for the suburbs, in describing the ideal living condition for 2020 – 2030.

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ John Gregory, *Carnival in Suburbia, The Art of Howard Arkley*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 2006.

Chapter Four explores the transitional nature of the new suburbs and uses the changing role of the use of caravans over the same period of time as an example of or an analogy to this transition. The caravan is used as a model to expose and document the change that is occurring in our interpretation of suburbia – the shift from the old established suburbs to new developments, the suburbs of the future and the predictions of how these new suburbs will function.

Chapter Five focuses on the many Australian artists for whom the suburbs have provided the central theme, subject matter, genre, style, and ideological sympathy of their art practice. Many contemporary artists are increasingly looking into their own suburban backyards as a source of reflection and review. I also touch upon the loss of traditional artisan skills in the trades, a result of the ‘flat pack’ syndrome. I go onto research and develop a photographic archive of real-estate developers’ signage that confirms that-suburban expansion is an epidemic on a national scale.

Chapter Six enquires into how the built environment defines personal identities within a community and how we perceive ourselves in the places where we live. This chapter will reveal how, from a sociological viewpoint, many coastal townships are losing their distinctiveness. I use Binalong Bay, Tasmania, and Point Lonsdale, Victoria as case studies to explain this phenomenon.

CHAPTER 1: The Art Works

The language of building: illuminating the skills of structure.

I was born in Ballarat, and from an early age became absorbed with ceramics. As a child I was entranced by some terracotta sculptures that students from the Ballarat School of Mines were installing in the bush; that experience inspired me to make my own small scale terracotta pieces that were fired in our domestic IXL wood stove. In 1972 my family moved to Geelong. I trained as an art teacher in Melbourne in the early 1980s, starting with an interest in textiles, but soon became sidetracked into ceramics. I have combined my own practice with teaching ever since, and have developed experience in making art for public places.

A local builder and neighbour, Ron Severino, built my parents' first 'brick veneer'. We moved into our brand new house and groovy new semi-suburb, Hillcrest Rd, Nerrina, (Little Bendigo) on the outskirts of Ballarat in 1968. This was my introduction to stud frame housing construction. Stubs of builders' pencils and stray nails became cherished possessions. I was hooked. This fascination with stud frame housing construction has never left me and has become central to my current research. To a degree, I have put aside ceramics for the moment; for example, I have incorporated buildings constructed from timber and paper in my installations, *Urban Growth Corridor* and *Dormitory Subtopia* (Figs 3 & 4). Its subject and form should not be surprising – considering I have worked as a residential building subcontractor for many years, and am very interested in construction processes – here with the framework visible on the outside, and the walls made of fragile translucent paper. As a boy I had made structures such as aeroplanes, from balsa wood and paper. Building forms like this have always been part of my life.

Sometime in the mid 1980s, the artist Greg Wain presented a talk and slide show of his artwork and lifestyle to the Victorian Ceramic Group. The talk

included some slides of a house he built in Eltham. As well as being an accomplished potter and sculptor Greg was a qualified ‘chippy’ (carpenter). His innate aesthetic, combined with his practical building skills, were the genesis for a truly spectacular home that boasted a myriad of sculptural elements. This was a pivotal point for me and I determined that one day I would build my own house. Over the next thirty years I have renovated two of my own homes, and worked as a residential building subcontractor. Now and then I still have the opportunity to work within the industry. The work and the camaraderie of the ‘tradies’ (tradesmen) is rewarding both socially and intellectually. Many of the skills I have acquired from these artisans I can and do apply directly to my studio practice. The architects, engineers, ‘sparkies’(electricians), plasterers, plumbers and carpenters I have met and know, were all happy to ‘lend a hand’ in the realisation of my nascent sculptural concepts.

Sadly, tradesmen with inherent skills, passion and respect for their chosen craft/trade, are not being replaced by a younger generation of skilled tradesmen. Take my trade for example: the carpenter, I can ‘cut a roof’, no trusses required. I can build a house from a bundle of sticks; I can apply trigonometry and geometry in the construction of a house. I see all the applied mathematics in its three dimensional splendour. I understand building language and the compilation of figures that underpin construction. I lament the ‘flat pack’ house syndrome that has overtaken the building industry. Invariably, the apprentice of today is working on a dumb assembly line, the house arrives on a truck; prefabricated trussed frames, ready to go, A-B-C clicks together, then on to the next ‘dream home’. In the trade they are coined ‘budget homes’. And budget they are, invariably there are no architraves, no skirting boards, 70mm by 35mm lumbers instead of 90mm by 45mm, nailed at 650mm centres instead of 450mm. The list of paring-back goes on and on. These homes look good for approximately six years, and within seven years things are starting to deteriorate. Is it pure coincidence that by the end of seven years, your building insurance has elapsed and only then do you realise you

have no recourse to restitution of your dream home? It is wrong. These apprentices aren't learning enough from the TAFE sector and if they're not learning from their boss on the job. Highly skilled trades such as carpentry should not become a 'McJob'. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word 'McJob: as an unstimulating, low-paid job with few prospects'.¹⁴ I still work within the building industry on a weekly basis as a Construction Supervisor for a large building company. In my experienced opinion, notions of pride in a job well done are being lost. The few large pre-fab-truss companies are well on their way to creating a cartel on how to build a home. A typical suburban house frame is delivered to the building site as complete trusses, which are relatively easy to assemble.

Installation works such as *Urban Growth Corridor* and *Dormitory Subtopia* (Figs 3 & 4) are direct realisations of my carpentry background. When undertaking my carpentry apprenticeship I was required to construct various scale models, of hip and valley homes. The construction of these models was a wonderful way to impress the visualisation of trigonometry and geometry onto enthusiastic minds. These models were a tangible way to experiment with more complex roofing construction techniques. The models are constructed from 11 x 20mm DAR (dressed all round) pine. The timber itself is in no way in scale with the traditional 90 x 45mm timber pine used in the construction of a real house; it is dramatically oversized. The 11 x 20mm scale is selected for model construction for the simple reason that it is a handy size to use when learning roofing principles. The primary tenet in stud frame building construction holds that 'a house is only as good as its roof'. A house is actually built from the roof down, not from the ground up. Whether or not the bare stud frame home is to scale or life size, isn't important here.

¹⁴ Kate Burridge, *Gift of the Gob: Morsels of English Language History*, Harper Collins, Pymble, 2010, p. 11.



3. Darren McGinn

Urban Growth Corridor, 2009

Detail of Installation at Craft Victoria, *Divertissement*,

A two person exhibition, 2010

Urban Growth Corridor and *Dormitory Subtopia* symbolise the excitement of embryonic suburban aspiration dreams... The great Australian dream of the home on the traditional quarter acre block is still alive and well in 2010.

Dormitory Subtopia is an ongoing and evolving major installation work. The installation is intentionally laid out on the floor. This is to mimic the real estate developers' obsession with the inclusion of aerial pictures on their billboard advertisements (Figs 5 & 6). The real estate signs promise to sell us a slice of utopia, and invariably they display a view from the heavens (this is what you can have). The relevance of the aerial/plan view of my 'suburb' is in accord with the signage and language of real estate and residential building development. I want the viewer to look down on it.



4. Darren McGinn

Dormitory Subtopia, 2009

Detail of installation



5. Darren McGinn

Real-estate billboard, incorporating aerial photograph, 2010

Digital photograph



6. Darren McGinn

Real-estate billboard, incorporating aerial photograph, 2010

Digital photograph

The installation visually represents a real estate development ‘in progress’, some homes have been occupied recently, others aren’t completed yet; some have just had the ‘slab’ laid. Two-storey McMansions are in abundance, it is embryonic and ‘going ahead’. There are stud frame homes that are half finished. The skeletal frames are pregnant with allegory and can be interpreted as representing erection, death and resurrection.

In early 2010, I presented an exhibition ‘*Divertissement*’ at Craft Victoria, in Flinders Lane, Melbourne; a joint showing of new works by myself and Dr. Christopher Headley. The works were presented as major installations to stimulate reflection and discourse on social, political and cultural themes. The exhibition provided an opportunity to preview *Dormitory Subtopia*, as a part of my research. Integral to the installation is a highly sophisticated LED (light emitting diodes technology) light matrix system. This system progressively failed throughout the exhibition. Each house was illuminated from within with a one watt LED warm white light. However, during the exhibition period, the LEDs blew up and melted. I found the whole dilemma quite interesting and pertinent to my research: the installation took on a life of its own, it became a real suburb, and it literally got out of control. The lights were going on and off in the houses; ubiquity was being challenged.

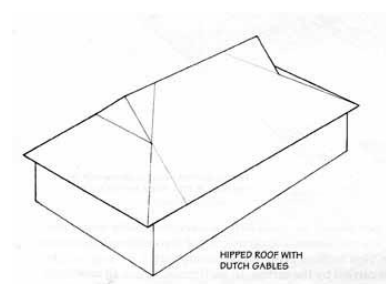
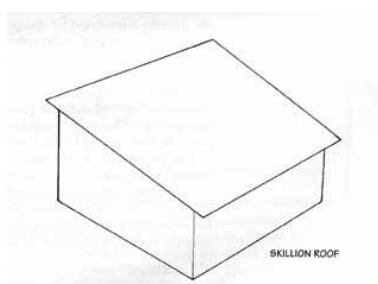
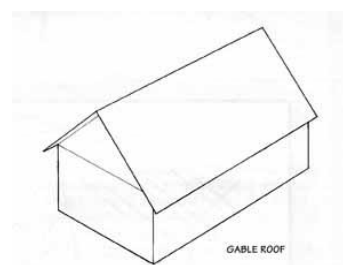
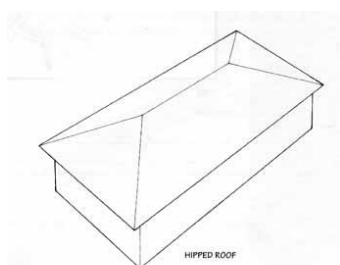
Dormitory Subtopia is a suburb of paradox...at night we see the houses all lit up, warm and cosy, full of the packaged hopes and aspirations promised by the developer and real estate brigade.

All of the homes in *Dormitory Subtopia*, *Urban Growth Corridor* and *Saw Horse Dreaming* are constructed using the traditional stud frame technique. Stud framing has been the most common house building technique in this country since sawmills began turning out 2X4’s and 2X6’s in the mid-nineteenth century, and is still considered to be the most practical form of house construction in most situations today.¹⁵ As timber supplies have

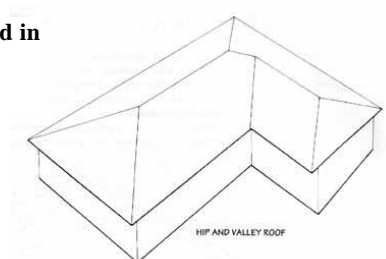
¹⁵ Llyod Kahn, Jr, ed, *Shelter 11*, Shelter Publications, Bolinas, CA, 1978.

diminished from the over-harvesting of old growth forests, plantation timber is being used more and more. Plantation timber doesn't have the 'tooth' or inherent strength of old growth timber and is becoming increasingly expensive. Steel framing is becoming a financially viable option for stud frame building. Invariably the alternative steel framing products are available in a powder-coated blue or green.

There are a number of common roof styles used in Australian housing. I have shown them here in their simplest format, but it is common to have various combinations of the same style and/or a mixture of styles in the one roof.¹⁶



7. The five most common roof styles used in Australian Housing



¹⁶ Charles Simpson & Barry Hodgson, Building a House Framing Practices, Macmillan Publishers, South Yarra, 1995, p. 138-139.

As part of the research outcome, I have made groups of ceramic buildings, caravans, sheep and “chooks” [chickens] (Figs 8 – 11). Initially the chooks and sheep were used as a visual metaphor, to express the mindless conformity of suburban existence, ‘the dumb flock or herd’ mentality. Various Australian sculptors have used the chook and sheep for subject matter, it is not the exclusive domain of any one artist; the sheep for example has been used by Australian sculptors including Les Kozzatz, William Eicholtz and Tony Trembath.

Australians are essentially nomadic and on average we move house every seven years. The ‘chook’ came to represent stability and security in the context of my research, something you reach once you are settled. The work *Brooder House* (Fig 8) comprises of a hip and valley stud frame house occupied by a bunch of roosting chooks.



8. Darren McGinn
Brooder House, 2008
Ceramic & DAR timber

My studio research includes the development and construction of slip-cast moulds used to make repetitive modules of these particular objects. The two major objects are a caravan, and a to-scale suburban house. I have also constructed a series of carpenters' 'saw horses' (Fig 12) and timber stud frame hip and valley houses which have been used in conjunction with the slip-cast modules to create a three-dimensional whole.

The caravan represents a coastal icon that considers the duality of both work and recreation. The caravan can be seen as a home on wheels searching for a place to live.



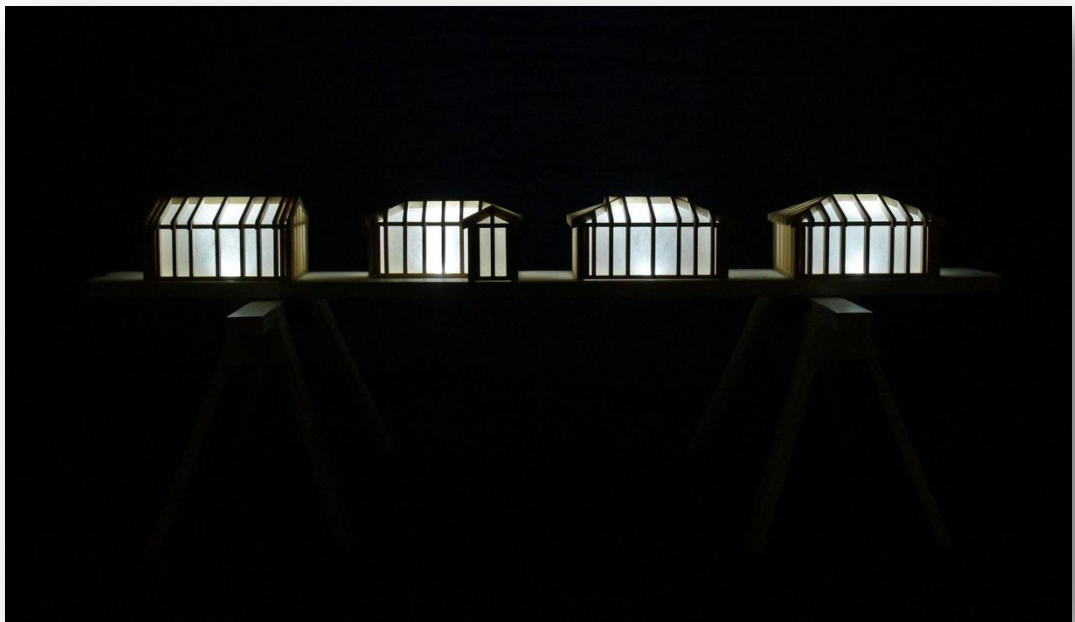
9. Darren McGinn
Nuclear Sheep, 2009
Hand modelled & slip cast modules



10. Darren McGinn
The Dreaded Double Booking, 2006
Hand modelled & slip cast modules



11. Darren McGinn
Self Storage, 2008
 Hand modelled & slip cast modules



12. Darren McGinn
Saw Horse Dreaming, 2010
 DAR timber, tissue paper & LED lights

CHAPTER 2: NOSTALGIA

The death of community and the unfolding of suburbia

From the outset of this investigation I have created an archive of photographic documentation of aspects of the maritime environment, the vernacular of place and how people identify with their particular bioregion. Initially, my research was conducted from a small boat on Port Phillip & Corio Bay (Fig 13).



13. Map of Geelong – Bellarine Peninsula – Werribee – Surf Coast – Great Ocean Road – The Otways & Hinterland. Geelong Easy Finder Directory, City of Greater Geelong, 2010-2011, p. 155.

I was documenting the Channel Marker System, and how the process of naming buoys and nautical navigation markers in the local vernacular came about. My works the *RIP* and *51* (Figs 14 & 15), situated on the Geelong/Corio Bay foreshore were directly inspired by these marker systems. These were two of the first works made in 2005, as part of this project. It was important for me to take the works back to the location of their origin because many of the ideas that were behind these works were inspired by objects no longer in existence.



14. Darren McGinn

The RIP, 2006

Construction grade timber, assemblage incorporating found objects

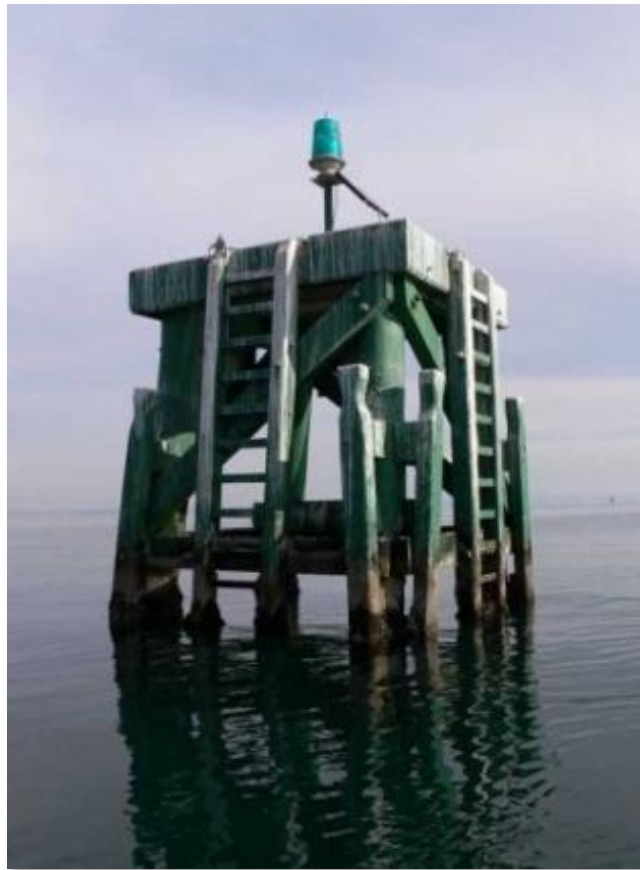


15. Darren McGinn

51, 2006

Construction grade timber, assemblage incorporating found objects

The entire Corio Bay channel marker system was in the process of being decommissioned, concurrently, with my initial research. Figures 16, 17 and 18 signify change; these beautiful old structures are actually 30 to 40 meters high. We only see the structures above water line; they plummet forever down and are anchored into the sea-floor. They have now been replaced by state-of-the-art channel markers that house on-board computers that talk to the other channel markers, all the way down to the 'RIP'. The RIP is the body of water that lies between Point Lonsdale and Point Nepean. It is the maritime and nautical entrance to Port Phillip Bay. In this context the art-works became an archive of this piece of local maritime history.



16. Darren McGinn
Old Channel Marker
Digital photograph, 2006



17. Darren McGinn
New & Old Channel Marker
Digital photograph, 2006



18. Darren McGinn
New Channel Marker
Digital Photograph, 2006

I also made works that were a tribute to people I had encountered. I was researching the names of boats and investigating the genealogy of these names. For example, seventy six year old Trevor Lee is a local Queenscliff resident; the son of a Queenscliff lighthouse keeper. Trevor is the keeper of a wealth of local folkloric history. *Trev's Bait Board & the White Lady*, is an example of an archival reference work, a visual record of fishermen, lighthouse keepers and pilots I have known, and do still know (Fig 19).

Trev's Bait Board & the White Lady is an assemblage of a bait board discarded by Trev (a fishing and work mate), and a scale model I made of the Coles Channel marker at the entrance to Swan Bay and the beginning of the Coles Channel. If you are from Queenscliff (Trev's locality), this marker is called 'The White Lady', an example of proprietary local vernacular. The White Lady is one of Trev's favourite 'whiting spots'. On a nostalgic level, the work also acts as a tribute to Trev, the son of one of Queenscliff's Lighthouse keepers, and reminds us that Trev represents the end of an era. Thus, the local vernacular of peoples' 'spirit of place' is evident in these initial works.



19. Darren McGinn

Trev's Bait Board & the White Lady, 2007

Paper clay and found object

Shortly after completing *Trev's Bait Board & the White Lady*, the research took a quantum shift. Literally, I got off my boat and came to shore on the Bellarine Peninsula, where I live. The Bellarine Peninsula is a spit of land, Geelong at its beginning and Queenscliff at the end. Corio Bay is on one side and Bass Straight on the other. This is the crossroad where the architect Robin Boyd's reflections on suburbia became relevant to my investigation. Fifty one years ago he wrote a book titled *The Australian Ugliness*¹⁷. Last year the book was re-issued on its fiftieth anniversary. When the book was originally published, Boyd was accused of being unpatriotic for his withering attack on Australian aesthetics. He argued that the Australian suburb was a material achievement and an aesthetic calamity. The book became a highly influential best seller, opening up debate in Australia about design, architecture and urban planning¹⁸. It still offers an accurate, scary and prophetic synopsis of the Australian suburban existence.

Whether it be Geelong, Bannockburn, Teesdale or Gisborne; Australian suburbanites still think they live in the best housing in the world because of the high rate of ownership; in fact this is appalling housing spatially, ergonomically and aesthetically¹⁹. In my opinion it must be an unpleasant experience for visitors to Geelong to view the housing developments along the roads to Colac, Lorne and Apollo Bay. The monotony could be considered depressing as these bloated, oversized, terrible houses, built on the smallest blocks in the traditional subdivision patterns seem to push relentlessly into the rural landscape. It could be considered as a waste of land, not to mention resources; initially the residents could feel depressed in this dormitory environment. It represents a nationwide epidemic of unsustainable and under-serviced growth corridors. Boyd's sceptical and sardonic perception of the suburbs is a candid insight into where most of us live. His arguments arose

¹⁷ Robyn Boyd, *The Australian Ugliness*, Penguin Books, Adelaide, 1960.

¹⁸ ABC Radio National, Late Night Live, Phillip Adams on Robyn Boyd, mp3, www.abc.net.au/rn/latenightlive/ [Accessed 6 July 2010].

¹⁹ Stephen Lacey, 'The Triumph of Ugliness'. Sydney Morning Herald, Fairfax Digital Media, 22/3/2008.

from a specifically Australian context that carries warnings and admonishments for anyone interested in built environments, the history of society and place. This book was instrumental in ensuring that my research as a scholastic thesis set something down in the theoretical area, namely the exploration of sociological and environmental aspects of suburban life and its relevance to my artistic practice. Boyd helps us recognize our suburban world, in all its' ugliness and all its' beauty.

I am aware of the paradox. The suburbs are places of nascent dreams and aspirations. It's what we have been conditioned to aspire to do. We must be careful not to lose aspects of community and community ideals. For example, there is a new approved residential development to be situated between Waurin Ponds (a suburb on the southern fringe of Geelong), and the coastal township of Torquay, named Armstrong Creek. It will house the population of Bendigo, approximately 60,000 people. Environmentally, there is a little creek called Armstrong Creek but its natural bioregion is in jeopardy as it is in the way of the Armstrong Creek development.



20. Darren McGinn

Armstrong Creek Development, August, 2010

Digital photograph

To illustrate this point, over the last two years, I have photo-documented, on the eastern outskirts of Geelong at Leopold, from the same location, the development of a new suburb. Figure 21 was taken in 2008, and Figure 22 was taken in April 2010.



21. Darren McGinn
Leopold residential development, 2008
Digital photograph



22. Darren McGinn
Leopold residential development, 2010
Digital photograph

In the photographs, we are seeing one street, in one new ubiquitous suburban enclave; a tiny part of the big picture. However, these developments are huge and omnipresent. I am questioning the validity and sustainability of our approach to selecting locations and shaping our new built environments. My investigation in part acts as a forum for this debate, and considers what may be advantageous and what is less desirable, in regard to our future built environments. A research outcome is to predict what the future has in store. One prophetic urban scenario, argued by Bernard Salt in his book *The Big Picture*, proclaims that by 2030...

...when almost one in three households contains just a single person? And this is not the young, sexy, 20-something single that blossomed in the 1990s. No the burgeoning market for singles in the decades ahead will comprise of sad lonely old baby boomers whose partners have died.²⁰

According to Salt, the outcome will be...

There will be no need for sporting fields in Australian suburbia in the 2020s but there will be a need for social and religious clubs to stem isolation within the 'burbs'. It is an odd fact that as Australians gets older and closer to death they also get closer to god.²¹

Each and every one of us is being sold a greedy, isolationist future; it is unsustainable, including its carbon footprint, dearth of community, death of the family and self imposed isolation. Whatever happened to the values of the extended family, espoused in the Milly Molly Mandy Stories?²² What we may

²⁰ Bernard Salt, *The Big Picture: Life, Work and Relationships in the 21st Century*, Hardie Grant Books, Prahran, 2006, p. 34.

²¹ *ibid*, p. 35.

²² Joyce Lankester Brisley, *Milly Molly Mandy Stories*, The Australian Publishing Co. Pty Ltd, Sydney, 1942.

learn from the Milly Molly Mandy Stories is the inherent worth and values of the traditional extended family all living together under the one roof. As well as the positive social factors of three generations cohabitating, it is important to consider the much smaller carbon footprint in relation to that of the nuclear family of two or one adults plus one or two children taking up the same space.

The real estate fraternity's billboard advertisements cover all future 'Arcadian' contingencies. For example, the Leopold real-estate billboard offers many amenities. The baby-boomer generation, the X-ers and even down to the Ys, today's teenagers and 20-somethings are all supposedly well-catered for. For a population of over 11,000 there is a smattering of general practitioners and a primary school. Leopold is just another dormitory suburb. If you really need something essential, a car trip to Geelong is in order; if you have an hour to spare 'each way', you can catch the bus in and out of town.



23. Darren McGinn
Melaluka Gateway Estate, real estate billboard, 2008
Digital photograph



24. Detail from figure 23

The bay markers discussed at the beginning of this chapter symbolise the nature of place, what makes it familiar to us and what makes it unique. These physical handmade icons became a part of this bioregion or sensitive micro-environment, thus providing a substantive symbol for the beginning of the project; namely, the unyielding development of the new suburbs into established micro environments.

CHAPTER 3: THE SOCIAL FACTORS

From my research it seems the ‘ripple effect’ emanating from our major urban growth corridors and suburban expansion seems to impact directly on our coastal communities and villages, with the subsequent imposition of the culture and politics of the new suburbs on the ‘host’ communities. How have our own particular suburbs changed? What leads people to decide which suburb they would live in: is it cost, amenity or a job? I am interested in comprehending this information in order to convey through my artwork the reason why the majority of Australians aspire so ardently to the suburban dream home.

David Burchell, in his book *Western Horizon*,²³ talks about suburbia fulfilling an almost contradictory role as a place of promise and also as a place of fear. He argues that the un-prestigious nature of the outer suburbs relates directly to the inception of the particular city itself. He uses the examples of both Melbourne and Sydney to explain his viewpoint. Both cities started off small, built around a particular location with a particular purpose; in the case of Sydney the harbour is the obvious one. These cities then extend outward; as time passes the original urban areas go through a period where parts of the city that had originally been salubrious become anything but so. Some residents are then quite happy to leave these areas and move further east, west or north or possibly into areas which to them promised some kind of liberation. Maybe it was for space, grass, and trees and they could build their own house on land that was very cheap and they could enjoy a lifestyle that previously they couldn’t access. These areas were often stigmatised by people from other more established parts of the cities and they, the residents were tended to be put down.

²³ David Burchell, Western Horizon, Scribe Short Books, Melbourne, 2003.

Life goes on

Rewind

1965

BARRY HUMPHRIES Interviewed by Louise Dwyer

The comedian recalls his first one-man show in Australia and how a suburban housewife named Edna Everage saved him from boredom.

This photo was taken at Melbourne Essendon Airport in 1965. I'd just returned from three years in England and I remember being very surprised at all the hoo-ha at the airport. I wasn't expecting it. I'd flown back to do a four-month tour of my first one-man show. Excuse it, at the Comedy Theatre. I'd never done a one-man show before and it was called *Hickory*, a very clever young entrepreneur, who convinced me to do my first and he produced it, too.

In those days, any performer who flew in from overseas would be forced to do a press conference right there at the airport, straight off the plane. Many people got asked, "What do you think of Australia?" and it was always said with some hostility. I think Noel Coward said, "You have beautiful rooftops."

England had always beckoned me, as it did most Australians of my generation. As soon as we could afford it, we all flocked back to the Old Country. Somehow I'd known that if I could save up enough money, I would leave Melbourne forever.

My assaults on suburbia were my only defence against the creeping boredom that Melbourne in the '50s seemed to exude. It wasn't until after spending 18 months in Sydney with the Philip Street Theatre that I realised how homesick I'd been for Melbourne and when I came back at that time (1955), I expanded the character of Mrs Everage and she started to directly harrass the audience. There were plenty of "angry young men" in my youth but they always seemed to blunt their attacks by being too serious.

I remember at one of my airport press conferences, a national television interviewer expressed a keen interest in the vocal technique that enabled me to perform Edna show after show. "Barry," he began, "tell that fellow bring on your vocal cords?" I am sure the besige word he sought to describe the required Edna sound was "falsetto".

My parents (Eric and Louisa) presumed me to do something more fiscally sound because it was important to them. My mother had a strong distrust of anything "artistic" and my father was a builder. They'd gone through the Depression and known a period of intense financial anxiety so I did feel a bit of pain that the very things I lived to do were bad news for them. Nevertheless, my education in the finer points of suburbia via my father's work provided a lot of artistic grist for the mill.

I only ever did things for fun and still do. People often ask me if I meant to be still performing in my 70s (Humphries is 72) but I never consciously set out to plan what my career would be. You might call me irresponsible but I always did what amused me.



Fast forward

I married Edna in 1966 and she's gone all across the world since then, even to Cannes. All my characters - from Dame Edna to Sandy Stone - were concocted in the '60s, well before this photo was taken. I wanted to write comedy about things I knew - the sort of people I knew in Melbourne, where I went to school and our neighbourhoods. There was a lot of people like Sandy and Edna around then, looking forward to their retirements. The departing Edna's invention with my current show *Black & White & Boogie Woogie* is at Melbourne's State Theatre until February 11, with Sydney to follow in May. Please do "tell it upping, at his age?" I'd I have fun up there. That's the only reason I keep at it. Don't you have fun when you watch it? I hope so.

Sunday Life 35

25. Barry Humphries The Sunday Age Magazine, 21/1/2007

It's more than 50 years since Dame Edna Everage used Moonee Ponds to launch her stellar career. And it's almost that long since Robin Boyd published *The Australian Ugliness*, his critique of the great suburban clutter. While the sprawl continues unchecked, the suburbs are changing, politically and socially. Have you ever wondered where working families might live? If you have listened to the rhetoric on fuel prices and interest rates, it is probably safe to assume it could be anywhere, as long as there are people paying off a sizeable mortgage and pumping fuel into at least one vehicle. The majority of 'working families' in the Bellarine locality live in outer suburbs, such as Teesdale, and Leopold. These mortgage belts of our major and regional cities are where most of our major elections are decided.

I believe there is a type of fear factor of cultural isolation from people who would rather identify themselves as 'inner city dwellers' and members of the high-end 'creative class'. People from the inner suburbs look out to these

suburbs, particularly those that sprawl forever outward. In relation to my city – Geelong, between Geelong and Melbourne are the outer suburbs of Lara, Little River, Werribee, Hoppers Crossing, Laverton and Altona. On the other side there is Belmont, Highton, Wandana Heights, Grovedale, Waurin Ponds and Marshall. They practically spill into the seaside township of Torquay. If you equate community as an important part of any culture according to David Nichols in his essay ‘The Uncultured Herd and Us’ the outer suburbs and ‘satellite suburbs’ should not be feared by ‘inner city dwellers’: “...We are in a suburban community and get on well with those of our neighbours we know”.²⁴

Patrick White and some of our post-war authors, such as Barry Humphries and the iconic Kath and Kim have presented the suburbs as a peculiarly Australian problem; as being featureless, characterless and lacking an emotional core that you may find in the heart of the city. In Melbourne, during the 1960s, Barry Humphries in the guise of Edna Everage, began to discover the spectacle of the Australian suburbs and gave it a sort of sardonic approval.

The suburbs, because they all look the same, are not usually marked by enormous cultural innovation. They lack a cutting edge and have become a sort of historical problem. In the words of Donald Horne:

The bohemians and rebels attack ‘suburbanism’. Indeed ‘suburbanism’, one way or the other, is likely to be the target of practically all intellectuals. And since most Australians live in the suburbs of cities this means that intellectuals hate almost the whole community.²⁵

During the 1960s and 1970s of the past century, this was a sort of guiding narrative of Australian public culture. In the arts, there was a sense that

²⁴ David Nichols and Mia Schoen, ‘Defend the Suburbs: The Uncultured Herd and Us’, *Meanjin Quarterly*, Volume 67, No 3: 25-34, 2008, p. 26.

²⁵ Donald Horne, *The Lucky Country*, Penguin Books, Adelaide, 1964, p. 25.

suburbia was something you had to leave, especially if you wanted to find a more sophisticated and cosmopolitan lifestyle.

Seminal Australian 1960s texts, such as Robin Boyd's *The Australian Ugliness* and *Australia's Home* (1960) and Horne's *The Lucky Country*, (1964) still directly relate to this contemporary, sociological discourse about the great Aussie suburban existence. In Horne's *The Lucky Country*, a substantial part of Chapter Two is dedicated to defending:

...The first suburban nation from ...almost all Australian writers ...whatever their politics are reactionaries whose attitude to the massive diversities of suburban life is to ignore it or condemn it rather than discover what it is.²⁶

In his essay 'The Triumph of Ugliness' Stephen Lacey considers Australia's visual illiteracy. He observes that:

...there are none so blind to beauty as those who are not taught to see ... Are Australians visually illiterate? That's the question that architects, designers and their critics have been pondering since the first convict staggered ashore, whacked up a bark humpy on the edge of Sydney Harbour, hung an 'emoh ruo' sign on the front door and stuck a gnome in the garden.²⁷

The Pritzker Prize-winning architect Glenn Murcutt is in no doubt.

One of the great problems of our country is that we are largely visually illiterate ...we do not have any education in the arts to speak of, except some lucky students who do art at

²⁶ *ibid*, p. 28-32.

²⁷ Stephen Lacey, *The Triumph of Ugliness*, The Sydney Morning Herald, Fairfax Digital media, 22/3/ 2008.

school. We do not get any instruction on design whatsoever. We think we live in the best housing in the world because we own our own house. It is appalling housing, it's appalling spatially. It's not architecture, it's merchandise. If I took it in personally, I'd die.²⁸

Glenn Murcutt said more recently he believed project housing was getting even worse, despite claims by developers that it is improving. However, he was reluctant to comment further. The rumour is that a company in Kellyville threatened to sue him over his comments on the area's bloated McMansions. "I do not want to talk about it; every time I do the shit hits the fan," he says.²⁹

Robin Boyd was so moved by what he perceived as our visual illiteracy, he wrote an entire tome: *The Australian Ugliness*, in which he argued that Australia was a nation of 'arboraphobes' - ready to put an axe to the nearest gum tree - and 'featurists', wanting to adorn our homes with gaudy colours and all manner of unnecessary decoration, from sandblasted koalas on our entrance hall windows to concrete garden storks with scarlet legs. Boyd went on to denigrate our cities, suburbs, nightclubs, industrial buildings, houses, cars and even the way we dress.

The Australian ugliness begins with a fear of reality, denial of the need for the everyday environment to reflect the heart of the human problem, satisfaction with veneer and cosmetic effects.³⁰

The architecture critic and author Philip Drew is in no doubt that Australia is a nation of almost endemic ugliness. He sees it as a product of our English inheritance:

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ Lacey, *op cit.* p8.

³⁰ Boyd, *op cit.* p8

Different cultures have different strengths. The British are strong at choral singing and literature, but they aren't a visual people. . . . Australians started off with a culture that wasn't very visually aware, and who saw architecture as something that was largely an indicator of class. The English middle class brought their architecture with them and that process of importing architecture is still going on today. The rare thing in Australia is for architects and designers to react to the environment itself, and to make that the starting point, rather than some obscure, remote reference which really skims off the aesthetic and leaves the milk underneath.³¹

Drew says Australians have a tendency to visit a beautiful European village and want to bring it back home. He explains that:

...there's a temptation just to take it, bring back here and plant it in the ground, but its total crap. It's as though you walk into a field of beautiful flowers and you pluck off the flowers, leaving the roots behind. You put it in the ground here and expect to get the thing growing.³²

What you get is an infestation of oxalis (sour-sop), that you will never eradicate.

Drew believes, that despite 200 years of colonisation, we are still to come to grips with the land on which we live. He argues we haven't engaged with this country and its' limitations. He recognises that we haven't engaged with it visually, in terms of creating an architecture that is sympathetic; one which builds on the visual qualities of the flora, the weather and the land itself.³³

³¹ Lacey, op cit.

³² *ibid.*

³³ *ibid.*

Glenn Murcutt is one of our few architects who have done that; I believe he's still in the minority. As Boyd so succinctly put it: "There can be few other nations which are less certain than Australia as to what they are and where they are".³⁴

The *Sydney Morning Herald* architecture critic, Elizabeth Farrelly, disagrees with Drew when it comes to blaming the English for our aesthetic failings. "...After all, the English created Oxford, Cambridge, Westminster, Chelsea, Soho and Durham Cathedral", she says.³⁵ Farrelly instead blames contemporary culture and what she refers to as its worship of cheapness and kitsch over the authentic.

Contemporary culture, generally, is visually illiterate. It always has been. The difference is that now it's running the show. It's what we're all living. . . . And it's not confined to Australia. McMansions, for example, were not invented by Australia, nor the English; they come from America and they have spread all through Europe. In fact, the new Europe is absolutely full of McMansions which make ours look modest by comparison.³⁶

The bottom line, Farrelly says, is democracy; democracy allows the people to exert their own tastes over any expert taste. It means people do what they want; so instead of just dreaming about building their dream home, they go ahead and do it; and we all have to live with it. Morally, we all think it's the right thing, but aesthetically it's a disaster. Political correctness wants us to believe that democracy and good taste are compatible, but they are not. Of course, the problem with any discussion on aesthetics is that it is totally subjective; one man's castle is another man's ill-conceived pile of brick veneer and roller doors.

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ Elizabeth Farrelly, *Blubberland: The Dangers of Happiness*, Cambridge, Mass :MIT Press, 2008, p. 48.

³⁶ *ibid.*

Others, such as the artist Chris O'Doherty (aka Reg Mombassa), see an inherent beauty in our streetscapes.³⁷ His images of suburbia are rendered with an almost biblical intensity, where the power poles become crucifixes in a kind of Antipodean Calvary. In the end ... does it really matter? If families of four are quite happy living in their 'featurist' Clarendon McMansion, or a grandmother loves her collection of chipped and faded garden gnomes, what's the problem? "Where people are doing their own, if you like, tasteless thing, that's fine, but they vote",³⁸ Farrelly says:

And in a democracy we're all dependent on a majority, and that means the majority's taste usually wins. If the majority's taste is uneducated, then usually the quality of the spaces follow suit. Which is why democratic cities are so different to the cities built by the ancient monarchies; so many of which are beautiful. Although if you have to choose, you choose democracy and equity over beautiful streets and squares. It would be lovely if we could have both.³⁹

But where does happiness come into the equation? Farrelly argues that good spaces do actually make you feel happier, they have a dignifying effect, even on people who have no consciousness of aesthetic issues; beauty makes you feel there is something higher, and it makes you feel connected to it.⁴⁰

Perhaps that kind of beauty is to be seen in a garden gnome, it would also have that effect. However, I only ever see garden gnomes ironically, which is completely different.

³⁷ Lacey, op cit.

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ Farrelly, op cit, p. 82.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

As already cited in Chapter 2, contemporary commentator on consumer, cultural and demographic trends, Bernard Salt in *The Big Shift*,⁴¹ charts the course of Australian society since European settlement. He correlates the shifts in population and demographic distribution, with cultural changes from the bush to the coast. He analyses the Australian suburban development and articulates an interpretation of the settlement of the Australian continent, charting the shifts and shuffles over the past 200 years that have made us who we are. He chronicles Australia from the unique bush culture of the swagman, to today's world of Boomers, Xer's and Dotcoms. He considers the impact of the rise of suburbia on our national psyche and maps out the likely influences, on Australian culture, over the early decades of the twenty-first century. Salt's conclusion is the rise of a third Australian culture - the culture of the beach.

What will the suburbs of tomorrow look like? '*Australian cities are expanding and they are under stress*'.⁴² You can observe it every day on our jammed roads and overcrowded trains and buses, carrying people on their way to work. We know we have to cut back on carbon emissions. How do you manage rapid urban growth? How should we shape new suburbs? As open space shrinks, what is the future for the detached house on the block of land in the suburbs? Will it remain viable? How much population density are we prepared to live with? What are the biggest issues we have to tackle to make our urban environments more sustainable? What does sustainable urban design look like? Data for 2009 commissioned by Comm Sec from the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows Australia has the largest houses in the world, with the average house size nearly three times larger than in Britain.⁴³ The cost of the bigger-is-better mentality is more than just financial; one really needs to consider size if Australian houses are to become sustainable.

⁴¹ Bernard Salt, *The Big Shift*, Hardi Grant Books, South Yarra, 2004.

⁴² ABC Radio National. Australia Talks. *The International Urban Design Conference*, 3rd September 2009.

⁴³ *ibid*, p. 5.

According to Dean Gillespie, Head of Bankwest Mortgages, "...the inclination of buyers to splash out on large mortgages, even if doing so prohibits them from spending money on the likes of holidays and retirement savings is tied to the notion of the great Australian Dream".⁴⁴ Gillespie explains further:

... it is often young families who believe the great Australian dream is a ... Large quarter acre block with a large house on it ... They have an expectation there will be a backyard and a nice, large house with plenty of space for their families.⁴⁵

Overly large houses can actually dislocate families from the community and from each other. This is the paradox of 'our great Australian dream'. When we all end up in separate bathrooms, separate lounge spaces and with a PS3 (Play station three, computer gaming console) in each bedroom, we unintentionally avoid those beautiful impromptu moments that happen in shared spaces.

All these questions are being asked and debated at a state-wide level. The national significance and implications of rapid urban growth is number one on many environment conference agendas. Queensland, for example, recently hosted the *International Urban Design Conference: The Suburbs of Tomorrow 2009*.⁴⁶ Keynote speakers included: Gordon Holden, The Foundation Professor of Architecture at Griffith University, Andrew McNamara, the former Queensland Minister for Sustainability, Climate Change and Innovation, and Adam Beck, an associate with ARAP multi disciplinary consulting practice to the built environment. Gordon Holden claims that many researchers, writers and politicians are talking essentially about people's behaviour:

⁴⁴ Joshua Jennings, 'Buyers are still in the space race', *The Age*, Easter Edition, 2/3/2010, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁵ *ibid*, p. 5.

⁴⁶ ABC Radio National, Australia Talks, *The International Urban Design Conference: The Suburbs of tomorrow*, 2009.

We really need to change the way we live and what our expectations are; and that has to come from a ground swell. We can't be told that, we can be encouraged, through leadership and by example all that is very important. In the end then what does that all look like.⁴⁷

Holden explains that we can break the urban environment into three categories: the suburbs, the great Australian dream; the semi urban area, the areas of urban development that are not quite suburbs that are a bit more intensely developed; and high density inner cities and inner town areas. They each have different solution potentials; the one of most significance to my research is the suburbs. For the suburbs, the ideal living conditions for 2020-2030 will include a house with some land adjacent to it, some sort of back yard, with a few chooks, a veggie patch and solar collectors on the roof. The house would have double glazing, be well insulated, oriented to get the breezes and be located within a walk to some shops, a train or a bus station. Holden thought about this and then realised that it sounded like his childhood, with the exception of the double glazing and the solar collectors.⁴⁸

Is it possible to accommodate a suburbia that still looks like this, with the rates of growth we are now seeing? Holden is suggesting that the suburbs can be developed and improved in their performance, and argues that we have seen this in autonomous housing examples all over the world. Holden believes it is important to constrain the boundaries of our cities. We can't keep eroding the edges; it is completely unsustainable in transport, in infrastructure, in social and economic terms.⁴⁹ How do we accommodate our burgeoning national population growth? Holden argues the best solutions are going to lie in intensifying our road corridors, where we have public transport systems, train lines, bus routes and so forth. He cites the example of the recent report from

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

Melbourne City, titled 'Transforming Australian Cities'⁵⁰. Holden speaks of this in quite convincing terms: although particular to Melbourne, the ideas discussed in the report are transferable and applicable to other cities.⁵¹ It provides a profile of opportunities for people to choose: high density, medium or lower density living, and the options are there.

Andrew McNamara at the International Urban Design Conference (2009) explains the significant role population density has to play in the development of the suburbs, and concurs that Holden's conjecture may come to pass.⁵² The proviso, however, is that we recognise that there are two explicit problems; one is an exponential population growth and the other -declining resources, particularly liquid fuels, with the imminent peaking of world oil supplies. McNamara considers these two problems to be the biggest design constraints, but argues if we take them into account when we look at how we may go forward, then we can build sustainable cities and suburbs. If we ignore them, as we have done for the last fifty years, we will continue to build unsustainable cities. If we use Melbourne as an example of what a waste of time, planning can be, if you do not get it right: Melbourne 2030,⁵³ released in 2002, was a wonderful plan, the problem was however, that it underestimated the population growth of Melbourne by fifty percent. On October 7th 2009, The Planning Minister, Justin Madden, released guidelines for urban fringe development, designed to make the urban sprawl more liveable. The Minister told Jon Faine that he doesn't have anything against 'McMansions', however we need 'diversity of housing stock' and developers will need to show potential buyers how far they will need to travel to schools and jobs.⁵⁴ But is the State Government going to support these communities with the right infrastructure?

⁵⁰ City of Melbourne Project Team, Transforming Australian Cities – For a More Financially and Sustainable Future, Published by The City of Melbourne, May 2009, <www.melbourne.vic.au>, Updated March, 2010, [Accessed 21 August 2009].

⁵¹ Holden, op cit.

⁵² ABC Radio National, Australia Talks, The International Urban Design Conference: The Suburbs of Tomorrow, op cit.

⁵³ Department of Sustainability and Environment, Melbourne 2030 – Planning for sustainable growth, State Government of Victoria, <www.melbourne2030.vic.gov.au>, Updated 2005.

⁵⁴ ABC Radio 774, Jon Faine's Hectic Half Hour, 7th Oct 2009.

Melbourne is attracting over 1500 to 1700 new residents a week.⁵⁵ According to a recent discussion paper on Victoria's ethnic population by Bob Birrel,⁵⁶ it is useful to divide the post-war migration program into two waves. The first, covering the period to the early 1970s, was drawn mainly from Britain and Europe. The second wave, which built up after a brief hiatus in the immigration intake during the mid-1970s and which still continues, was drawn mainly from Asia, the Middle East and other non-European societies:

Melbourne has shared in both waves. But whereas the city was the dominant settlement point in Australia for first-wave migrants, it has played a secondary role (to Sydney) as the main locus for the second. The first wave had an enormous impact on Melbourne, leading to the creation of substantial ethnic communities, particularly from people originating from Southern Europe. These people are still making their presence felt, at least in demographic terms, as they move through the life cycle. By 1996 nearly half (47.5%) of all adults aged 45-64 who were living in Melbourne were born overseas.⁵⁷

It is important to note that most second-wave, low-income migrants are locating in suburban areas with the lowest costs of housing, such as Moreland and Dandenong in Melbourne, as well as in Geelong.

The parameters which underpinned the Melbourne 2030 plan were severely underestimated. Accordingly, the then Victorian government abandoned it. The Planning Minister, at the time, Justin Madden, charged with the carriage and conduct of one of the most important pieces of planning law to make its

⁵⁵ ABC Radio National, Bush Telegraph, Brining Life Back to Regional Towns, Demographer Bernard Salt from KPMG, 1/12/09.

⁵⁶ Bob, Birrel, Ethnic Population, School of Historical Studies, Department of History, The University of Melbourne, July, 2008, <<http://www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM00535b.htm>> Updated: 25 February 2010.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

way through the Victorian Parliament in years, failed in this task. His amendments to the urban planning scheme for Melbourne's urban growth boundary did not pass. The then Opposition, raised objections and successfully deferred the introduction, of what the Premier of the time, John Brumby said, were the most important changes to planning in Victoria for years. Early in 2010 in the State Parliament, John Brumby's much discussed and much consulted, over extension of Melbourne's urban growth boundary, failed to get through, in what the then Opposition claimed was another 'muck up' by the then, embattled Planning Minister Justin Madden.⁵⁸ Madden proposed to amend the Melbourne 2030 planning scheme, in order to extend the growth boundary of Melbourne and also to improve or increase the density of developments in inner Melbourne. The amendment also included the regional fast rail link and the outer metropolitan freeway reserve (outer ring road). Both the aforementioned, directly affect the Bellarine region and its suburban development. If Government can't agree on how to best shape our urban future, issues in regard to affordable housing, more housing, additional housing stock, more infrastructure, roads and public transport are left to languish in the doldrums. According to Madden:

... ensuring that we can provide for the growth that we are seeing and the increased demand for dwellings and that's not necessarily related to population growth, that's related to the way people to choose to live these days.⁵⁹

There is the problem in a nutshell: it is all unsustainable. The incumbent government and the Opposition need to take a bipartisan approach to such a serious dilemma. Even if we go back to 2002 and the *20-30 Vision*, it has become increasingly apparent that the major political parties haven't got a clue on how to plan for our future built environment.

⁵⁸ ABC Radio 774, Jon Faine's Hectic Half Hour, June 21, 2010.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

As mentioned previously in this chapter, Andrew McNamara, a keynote speaker at the International Urban Design Conference 2009 believes we are kidding ourselves: while we continue to do homage to the car while ignoring the fact that cheap liquid fuel is about to be a thing of the past, we do no service to the future generations of people who are relying on us to get this right.⁶⁰

People will have to be prepared to leave the car in the garage, to maybe reduce usage to one car per family. How prepared are people to change their life? Our houses are one example of the challenge we face. They are getting bigger and bigger at a time when the number of people living in them is getting smaller and smaller. What is going on here is explained by Melinda Dodson, the Australian Institute of Architects' (RAIA) National President:

Houses are double the size they were in the seventies and not surprisingly we have more than doubled our energy consumption as well. It is tied to a whole range of things, including wanting two bathrooms, a two car garage and inevitably two living spaces.⁶¹

Dodson believes we have to ask the question; who are we designing for? We have an ageing population; we have issues with housing affordability. She contends, there is a need to review what we really need a house to be and what the design response is. In my view people need to change their expectations. People want to live in bigger houses when there is a need to live in smaller houses. How do we get to change these expectations is a key issue. Dodson believes the answer lies in such things as demonstration projects. Projects that show people an alternative picture, and for her as well, part of it is that:

⁶⁰ op cit, ABC Radio National, Australia Talks, The International Urban Design Conference, 2009.

⁶¹ *ibid.*

...we do have an identity that is linked to the Australian suburban home, its part of our identity and culture. And we really are looking for other versions of that.⁶²

Dodson explains that we need compact houses that do still offer a garden space for the kids to play in, but recognises that we want houses that are closer to shops, closer to the nearest bus or train. At the same time we need to acknowledge that eighty to eighty-five percent of Australians do live in or want to live in a detached house. It is part of our identity, and when we talk about density, often the discussion polarises on very high density that is on tower blocks, contrasted with low density suburban houses. The solution, Dodson argues, lies in the middle space, namely, in medium density and compact housing.⁶³

Housing affordability is a crucial part of the suburban sprawl phenomenon. Andrew McNamara points to the following: for some time we have had an unending stream of media releases from the housing industry saying we have a housing affordability crisis. He believes they are right but for all the wrong reasons. He explains:

...if you build houses that are larger than people need, and sell them to people for more money than they can afford to repay. Then you indeed have a housing affordability crisis. But the idea of first home buyers' young couples thinking that they need a four bedroom house with a sleep out and a parent's retreat and an office is frankly absurd. The political class do the people that they represent no favours by pandering to this rubbish. We have seen very little to rebut this proposition by the finance industry and the building industry, that somehow the problem lies with local councils in not putting more cheap land on the market, so that we can

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ *ibid.*

build McMansions very, very far away from all the support that is needed for those people.⁶⁴

Where does population sit in the equation, is it the elephant in the room? All speakers at the 2009 International Urban Design Conference agreed that, population growth can provide significant opportunities and efficiencies with respect to sustainability. There was general agreement that we need to embrace population growth and look at the benefits it can bring. Gordon Holden agreed with Andrew Beck: they do not see population as the elephant at all, and explain that it is an opportunity, to ensure that the next generation of activities and policies, and the way in which we go about things can be improved. Is there then an argument in favour of cities that are hugely populated? Both Holden and McNamara use Hong Kong as an example of one of the most sustainable cities in the world that is host to a huge population.⁶⁵ What then makes for sustainable cities and suburbs? We need to factor in the basics and get them right. The key factors include diversity of housing, water collection and disposal of waste, power generation, supply and distribution of power and how it can be forwarded into the grid and finally, accessibility of the housing stock to good public transport.

Holden presents statistics and calculations from overseas, that suggest that the emissions generated by people, commuting to a building, for work, are greater than the emissions generated by the building itself. These issues, not initially apparent, have to be addressed also. If we got our transport right and more people moved from private to public transport usage, and if we got our mix of housing right, with people living in smaller houses, in regions of density, but also regions of green and open space, only then could we accommodate the vast increase in population; which appears to be inevitably coming our way.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

What does the future hold in store for the suburbs, whether they be in my region the Bellarine, or somewhere in Queensland? Our cities are already built and established, whether it is for better or worse. According to Adam Beck, it is possible to retro-fit cities, and he cites overseas examples such as Toronto, New York, Paris and Rotterdam.⁶⁶ The reality of what happens in the cities is relevant to this research, that is: if cities can be contained as a consequence, the perpetual outward spill of rapid growth would to some extent be contained in our regional areas. This is an old idea and has been around for a long while, the Romans did it.

This is the point at which there is no consensus; some believe that the idea that population growth and economic growth are inextricably linked is wrong, and that there are three ways to grow an economy. You can grow it by growing your population. However, advanced societies tend to grow their economies, by improving their domestic efficiencies, and by engaging in ever increasing international trade. Both Holden and McNamara agree that this is how wealth is generated.⁶⁷ The aim of the game has to be how you grow the pie; not the number of mouths that you are trying to feed from that pie. So the argument, that you can have population growth and economic growth, misunderstands the relationship. Population growth will be a drag on economic growth; it is certainly a drag on the environment. According to this argument, to suggest that unrestrained population growth can exist with good environmental management is simply and emphatically incorrect.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

The intention of this chapter was to investigate the culture and politics of the new suburbs, and to explore, how this imposes direct consequences, upon our coastal communities and villages. On a national level, the chapter analysed the impact of political imperatives on the suburbs, and questioned what is truly sustainable for the suburbs, in describing the ideal living conditions for 2020 – 2030. I have used this information in the exhibition to visually represent the linkages which occur between the city and the environment that supplies its needs.

CHAPTER 4: ON THE URBAN FRINGE:

The Caravan

An analogy I would like to use here, to illustrate the transitional nature of the new suburbs, is the changing role of the use of caravans over the same period of time. The idea of caravanning was a pre-cursor to the holiday shack; now the shacks have been demolished to be replaced by expensive home sites. The caravan is used here as a metaphor to expose and document the change that is occurring in the way we interpret suburbia – the shift from old established suburbs, to new developments; the new suburbs of the future and the expectations concerning their functioning.

The caravan is a flagship; a symbol which epitomises Australia's annual translocation of the suburban 'gated' lifestyle to ancestral holiday destinations: 'Getting away from it all', the caravan represents 'the good life', and the thirty five hour working week. For the context of this investigation, the caravan is emblematic of a myriad of aspects of Australian culture, that directly relate to our suburban nation.

Caravanning found a niche in Australia's leisure industry, well before caravan parks became a feature of our landscape. As early as the 1920s, Australians began holidaying in some wonderfully eccentric looking caravans, many of which were home made. In these early decades of the 20th century, caravanning was impromptu, with vehicles parked roadside and in paddocks.



26. Dorrit Black
Caravan Camp (detail), 1945
Watercolour

Australians have an anecdotal reputation of being a people to whom leisure is important; we work to live rather than live to work. However, that reputation has been earned recently. Until the 1930s, Australian workers did not have ‘holidays’ as we know them now. There was half-day closing on Saturdays, which during the late 1800s allowed more people to take a weekend break, but that was all. Holidays belonged to the privileged and already idle. It was not until the printing unions won a week’s paid annual leave in 1936, that the Commonwealth Arbitration Commission then began awarding one week paid annual leave.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Richard White, *On Holidays: A History of Getting Away in Australia*, Pluto Press, North Melbourne, 2005, p.122.

In the years following World War Two, governments increased the amount of time people could take for relaxation from work; unions fought successful battles to improve working conditions. There was, suddenly, a rapid rise in the amount of paid leave, available to Australian workers: four weeks annual leave! Economic prosperity and widespread car ownership also meant the possibility of ‘getting away’ for a holiday. The holiday became an integral part of life. Those getaways seemed to involve a beach and a caravan park. Australia became known as the ‘land of the long weekend’, after a book by Ronald Conway who introduced this new phrase into the Australian lexicon in 1978.⁶⁹

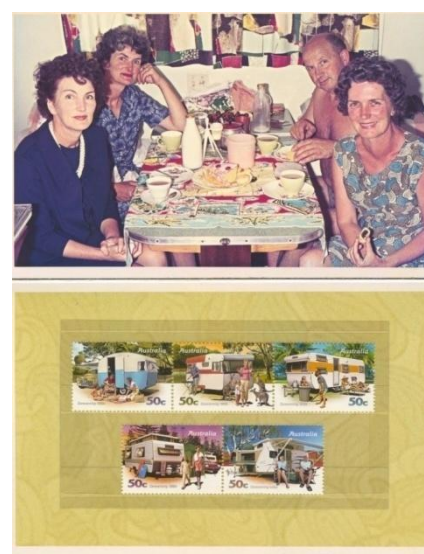
Holidaying for the masses took off in the 1950s: the launch of the Holden car in 1948, the ready availability of consumer credit by the mid-1950s, the quadrupling of men’s average weekly earnings, the appearance of modern service stations, and many car-friendly innovations, such as motels and better roads, encouraged travelling. It began with the ‘Sunday drive’ and soon turned into annual holidays and the long weekend break. But equally important in the development of the holiday in Australia, was the increase in leisure time, gained by the middle of the twentieth century – a 40 hour week, free Saturdays, four weeks of annual leave and holiday loading. More and more families acquired cars, cameras and caravans, and packed themselves off to the beach, to the country, and to the mountains for weeks and weekends of pleasure. By the 1970s, holidays and the long weekend had become a core feature of Australian life.

During the 1950s the craze for caravanning really took hold in Australia. The 1950s brought greater prosperity, enabling better roads and access to cars and petrol stations, and by the end of the decade caravan parks were gaining a foothold. However, it is not my purpose to look back to the 1950s, but to celebrate caravanning from that decade through to today. This seemingly

⁶⁹ Ronald Conway, Land of the Long Weekend, Sun Books, South Melbourne, 1978.

disparate chapter illustrates the diversity and shifts that the contemporary caravan culture embraces.

For many Australians, the sight of a caravan park or the hiss and glow of a gaslight can be enough to evoke memories of family holidays spent in caravan parks. Going on holidays down to the beach I still take my children to the same caravan and camping park that my parents took me to when I was a child; we do it every year. It is a general translocation of the suburbs; I live in East Geelong and just like a hatch of cicadas or Bogong moths, my neighbours and my family awaken from our dormitory torpor and head for Ocean Grove. Our neighbours go; all the children go as well as their school friends and the extended family. We do not stay in caravans, we stay in tents. Australians all over the land do this, we are a bunch of laggards, creatures of habit, we do the same thing because it is safe, and that's the way our culture has been built up.



27. Collectors Stamp Pack
Caravanning Through the Years, 2007
Pack design: Jo Mure, Australia
Post design Studio

**Pack images: photographs Les Breckon; map section reproduced
with permission of UBD c/o Universal Publishers Pty Ltd DG**

The artist, Alex Selenitsch attempts to address the limitations of the caravan's futile attempts to discover true emancipation from the suburbs. His definition acknowledges the duality, or mixed metaphor, that is the caravan:

In a caravan, one kind of space longs for the other. The box can sense a freedom in the ability to spontaneously relocate, to move across different textures, through various climates. The wheels know that space is not perpetual and that something magical can happen when the flow stops and the surroundings are gathered into an image. But each space can have its own desire or will. At rest in a cubic landscape, the caravan's carcass (the box, the crate) looks forward to the stationary place, the forever stillness that all institutions long for, as history slipstreams past and decorates the box with whirls and eddies.⁷⁰

From a 'third person's view', Australians could be seen as essentially nomadic and gypsy like. It is a statistical fact that the average Australian family sells their home every seven years. The new 'dream home' and the caravan are emblematic of the Australian search for place and identity. The caravan, can be seen as a home on wheels searching for a place to live. It is interesting to note that in contemporary caravan vernacular and parlance the term 'caravan' is being replaced by the term 'mobile home'.

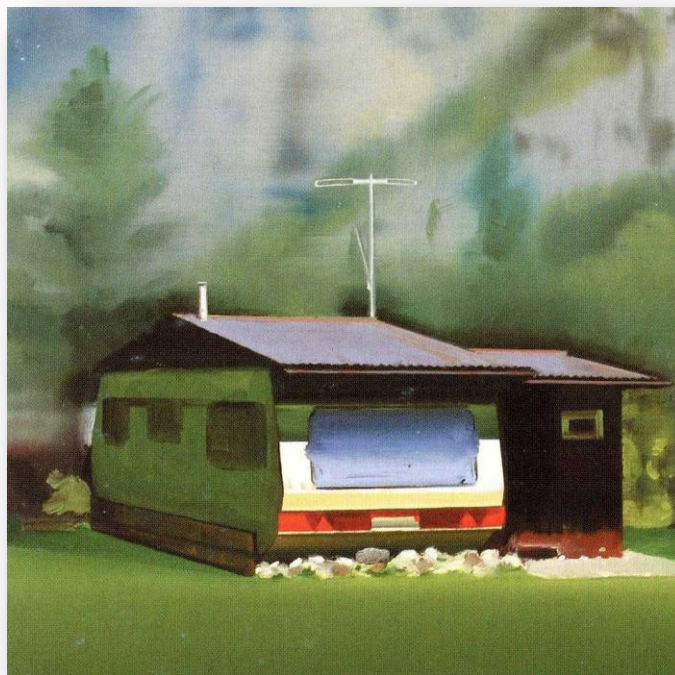
The artist David Ralph has utilised the image of the caravan as a metaphor for escape, for a return to nature or, at the very least, a brief stint away from urban madness (Fig 28). But do they really escape or do they simply substitute one suburban existence for another? In her catalogue essay for Ralph's exhibition *Mobile Home*, 2006, Raphaela Davidson suggests:

⁷⁰ Tibor Novak & Alex Selenitsch, Caravans, Gordon Media, Geelong, 1999.

If the home is where the heart is, Ralph envisages a displaced heart in mobile home. He seeks to imagine a world of mobile dwellings, not necessarily on vacation, but heading for the hills in the chaos embedded in our nerve-wracked cities.⁷¹

Ralph explains that he likes what the mobile home represents. To him it represents

...namely freedom and personality. I like the idea of the mobile home as a metaphor, and a psychological container of dream and fantasy” he continues to argue that: “... many people dream of an alternate way of life, escaping the confinements and boundaries of city life.”⁷²



**28. David Ralph
Belair, 2006
Oil on Canvas**

⁷¹ Raphaella Davidson & David Ralph catalogue essay, Mobile Home, Arc One Gallery, Melbourne, 2006.

⁷² *ibid.*

One only has to visit the caravan and camping grounds of southern Victoria, to realize that his utopian vision is flawed. They are monotonous, scaled down, and grid-lined versions of the suburbs, which the occupants, the campers believe they are escaping. This particular exodus has blinkered vision. This annual pilgrimage is also in serious decline and is already terminated in many of our coastal townships. For the past two decades developers have been buying up coastal caravan parks and developing them into town houses, luxury resorts and shopping centres.

Countless caravan parks along the Victorian coastline are succumbing to the twin pressures of population growth and demand for holiday houses. In recent years many parks have been turned over to developers. On Phillip Island at Cowes, in early 2010, Woolworths lodged plans to turn the Boomerang Caravan Park into a \$20 million shopping centre. In mid 2010, at Barwon Heads, the developer Hamptons won approval to carve up the Rondor Caravan Park into forty three residential lots. In Portsea, developer Bourskope has started selling house plots on the site of the old caravan park it purchased two years ago. And in Torquay, former Richmond Football Club president Clinton Casey has turned the Zeally Bay Caravan Park (for which he paid \$12.5 million in 2003), into a luxury resort, town houses and apartments.

The caravan park's demise is not just a coastal phenomenon; there are many inland examples including along the Murray River, Lake Wendouree, and Echuca.

Back to the coast; at Inverloch, all three caravan parks in the town have been zoned to make way for housing development. The lament is for the death of the great Australian holiday; it is getting harder and harder to secure a good place to take a caravan.

Caravan parks are often the obvious geographical choice for higher density housing and retail centres, because they are situated on large parcels of land, often with beach frontages, and are close to the main street. The situation of

the coastal caravan parks is that their land value has outgrown the profitability of the business. It is inevitable that local parks will disappear. Historically Australians came to coastal caravan parks for seclusion, quiet beaches and to get away from suburbia. But what is being built is replicating the suburbs and the city. Victorian Caravan Park Association's president, Peter Cornish, believes several operators in towns such as Rosebud, (Mornington Peninsula) were considering selling or demolishing sites to make way for upscale holiday accommodation or mobile home parks for permanent residents.⁷³

The caravan is a symbol of social paradox. The caravan has many different uses: from coastal to outback destinations, from informal camping to caravan parks and from family holidays to retiree road trips. Most important, is its degeneration from a new mobile holiday home reflecting affluence, which morphs into a poor quality permanent home as the vehicle ages. The imagery of once beautiful vehicles now derelict, even abandoned, has been the visual source for my series of caravan sculptures.

Thus it becomes an ambiguous symbol, of a social morass of economic deprivation; a space imposed on those less fortunate. The caravan becomes a shelter of last resort, for the poor and socially dispossessed and they are segregated from the community. It is the place of last abode, or accommodation, just one up on the social rank from the thousands of Australians who are sleeping rough in cars or on the street.

The sculpture, *Busman's Holiday* (Fig 29) has been shot on location, emphasising its impact, when integrated into the Barwon River foreshore landscape of Ocean Grove's camping ground. The sculpture is a tribute to a caravan park, under the threat of closure, due to a residential development. The caravan is an object of interest for many artists including Reg Mombassa, David Fraser, David Ralph and Mathieu Gallois. Craig Bremner curated a Caravan exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, as early as

⁷³ Jason Dowling, 'Housing estate pushes urban sprawl limit', *The Age*, 29/8/2010, p. 7.

1992. More recently, Bob Jenyns won the 2007 Helen Lempriere National Sculpture Award with his work *Pont de l'archeveche*. His sculpture was of a caravan made from life size 'Meccano' parts.



29. Darren McGinn
Busman's Holiday, 2007
Ceramic & construction grade timber

My 'caravans' are visual representations of the accoutrements both of wealth and of poverty. As well as the freedom and holidays, represented are the hundreds of thousands of Australians who live in caravan parks. For some, it is a temporary measure while they go through a financial rough patch, but, increasingly, it is a long term option for people who can't afford to rent or buy a house or unit. The St Vincent De Paul Society claims there has been at least a doubling in the number of people turning to caravan parks since 2001. In a report called 'Residents at Risk',⁷⁴ the charity estimates at least 50,000 people

⁷⁴ St Vincent de Paul Society, Social Justice Report, Residents at Risk. Stories of Last Resort, 2008.

across the country to be one step away from homelessness, using caravan parks as crisis accommodation. For example, some residents of the Narrabundah Longstay Caravan Park in Canberra have lived there for more than 20 years.⁷⁵

As our coastal holiday parks are being sold off to a ‘privileged’ few, it is lamentable that our suburban nation’s most cherished annual pilgrimage to the beach for summer holidays is under threat. The caravan once provided a relatively inexpensive holiday for Australians – does it still provide that?

For the purpose of my research the caravan translates itself as a motif of transitory marginal existence. The caravan is at once a vehicle and a home, and much like the new suburbs: ‘a state in-between state’, without a community or status. It alludes to a transitory time of displacement in contemporary life.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

CHAPTER 5: The depth and diversity of artistic practice that is inspired by our suburban and coastal existence:

Howard Arkley, John Brack, Alex Danko, Mathieu Galliois, Greer Honeywill and Jenny Watson are among the many Australian artists, for whom the suburbs have provided the central theme, subject matter, genre, style, and ideological sympathy in their respective art practices. Included in this spectrum of distinct, artistic disciplines are abstract, photo realism, figurative painting, printmaking, photography, sculpture, glass, ceramics and writing. Over the years, Australian artists, from the painter Brack to the writer of fiction, Tim Winton, and the painter Watson, have dipped into the currency of communities as their leading narrative. This use of the suburban community as a source of social commentary is not a peculiarly Australian phenomenon; for example, the American ceramic artist, Robert Arneson, created the series, *Alice St House* in the late 1960s.

Literature on Australians' and other cultures' relationships with the suburbs, the beach, the sea and the sea-side, included books by Lucy Lippard, *Lure of the Local* – a celebration of regionalism. Edward Casey's, *The Fate of Place*, George Johnston's novel *My Brother Jack* and of course Robin Boyd's, *The Australian Ugliness*; were all valuable material resource. Both *My Brother Jack*, and *The Australian Ugliness* continue to provide a vivid prose account of the ennui and entrapment of the Australian suburb. It was also of some value to look at some of the post-structuralist human geographers, such as Edward Sojo.

My suburban investigation, takes up the baton from artists and historians, such as Howard Arkley and Chris McAuliffe. Just over a decade ago Arkley was depicting the subtle nuances and beauty of Melbourne's established inner suburban architecture and culture. His painting: *Family Home Suburban Exterior*, 1993, depicts an established, hip and valley, stud framed, brick veneer home (Fig 30). We presume the cosy home is safely nestled in a

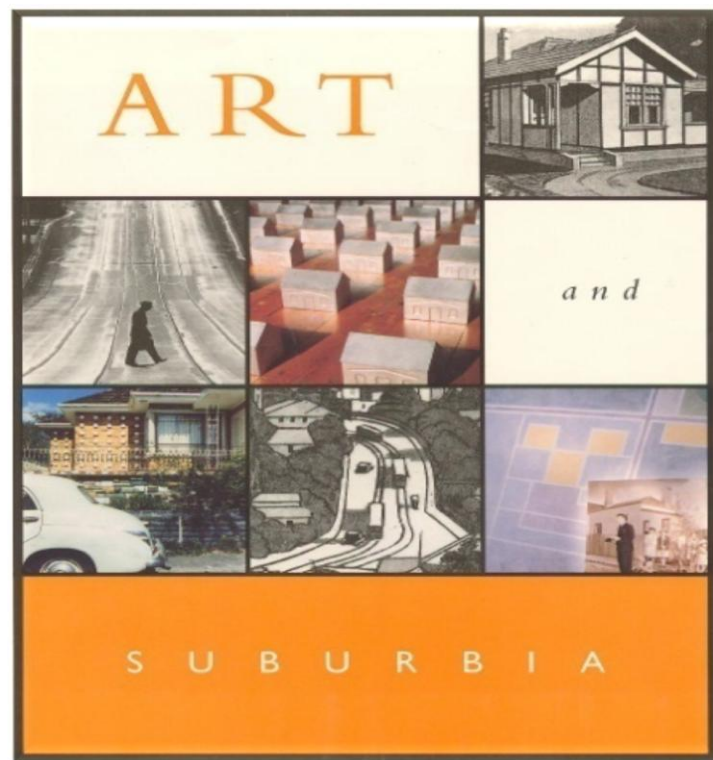
community that boasts hospitals, doctors, schools, sporting facilities, churches, libraries, and public transport; all the infrastructure that evolves over a period of time.

New developments in urban growth corridors promise such infrastructure but rarely deliver. The developers are trying to convince you, that not only are they selling you 'bricks and mortar' and a piece of land, but are also cajoling you into believing they are selling you an instant community. But communities take time to develop.



30. Howard Arkley
Family Home Suburban Exterior, 1993
Painting

In 1996 the art critic Chris McAuliffe published *Art and Suburbia*⁷⁶, in which he documents the growth and changing nature of the suburbs. The book presents a host of diverse responses - from the banal to mordant suburban vignettes. His observations are now fourteen years old. My research (and that of other contemporary sculptors such as Mathieu Gallois in his art and architecture) into our suburban nation takes up where McAuliffe's exploration and dissertation finished.



31. Chris McAuliffe,
Art and Suburbia, 1996

⁷⁶ Chris McAuliffe, *Art and Suburbia*, Craftsman House, Sydney, 1996.

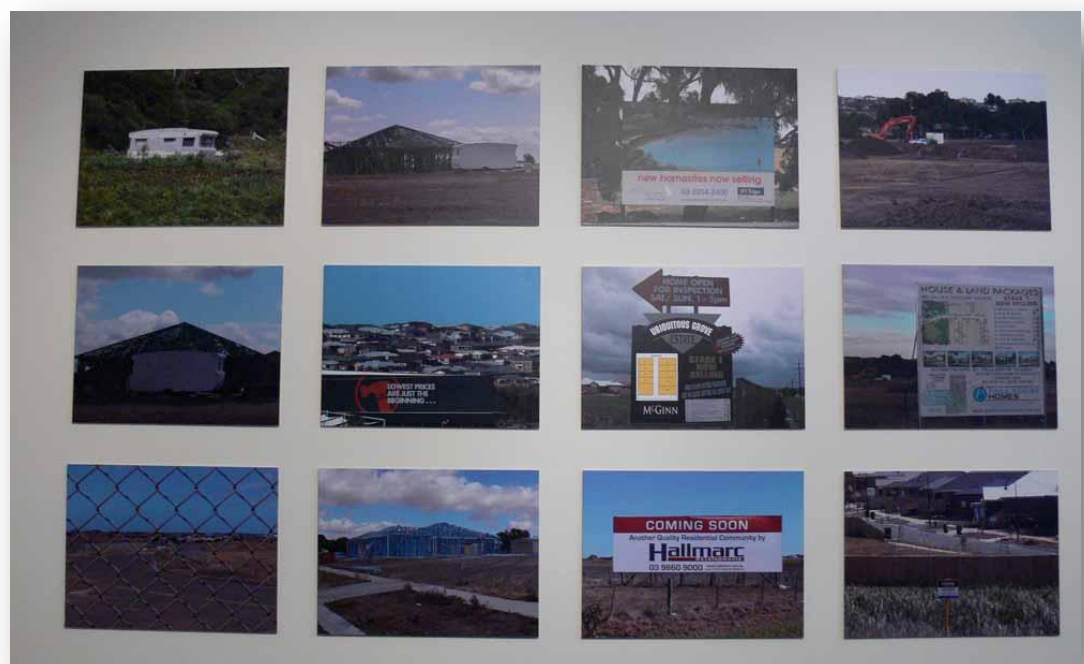
Art and Suburbia maintains its validity as a critical text. For example, the sculpture, *Day in Day Out*, 1991(Fig 32), by Aleks Danko, still encapsulates many of the sociological dilemmas that emanate from the regional suburbs built since 1991 *Day in Day Out* is a severe visual and critical appraisal of the land and culture that Danko found himself in. The work implies feelings of dislocation and alienation. *Day in Day Out* was recently exhibited in *Mortality*, 2010, a group exhibition at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art. The installation's relevance to ideological contemporary suburban discourse has not diminished.



32. Aleks Danko *Day in Day Out*, 1991

Detail of installation, bronze cast houses

As part of the research I have photo-documented real estate developer's billboard advertisements, which are inviting people out of the city to be part of 'instant communities'. They are exhibited, as a grid of twelve colour digital photographs. Each photograph has the dimensions of 60 x 40 cm landscape orientation, printed directly onto 6mm foam core board. I have chosen the 6mm foam core board as the canvas; it is a common material used for real-estate billboard advertisements. *The Grid* represents the dividing up and selling off, of what were once bioregional communities, which are quickly being morphed into ubiquitous suburban developments. The photographs have been taken over the last four years. Geographically I have photo-documented aspects of Tasmania's north east coast and regional places around Victoria. These two proximities confirm that the suburban expansion is epidemic on a national scale.



33. Darren McGinn
The Grid, Started 2005
 Digital photographs

The Grid reveals hollow truths and displays scant homage to the real currency of communities; they offer a glimpse, but never reveal the whole; they cannot because it isn't there. In my opinion real-estate billboards are often falsely didactic and advertise claims that are not entirely true. Claims: 'where lifestyle comes naturally' is the type of dialogue real estate developers are feeding us: "... you are going to get all this!" They are not going to tell you that you are both going to have to work '24/7' and never be at home because you are trying to pay off a ridiculous mortgage on a house whereas your parents worked towards developing and adding onto theirs over their lifetime. Now we have to have it all, at the beginning, straight away.



34. Darren McGinn
Kensington Estate billboard, Leopold Victoria, 2010
Digital Photograph



35. Darren McGinn

Melaluka Gateway Estate, Leopold, Victoria, 2010

Digital Photograph

The 'snake oil merchants' are in competition with each other, and yet just like a bunch of seagulls they cluster together and squabble for the titbits; the titbit being your mortgage. 'Cheek by jowl' the display homes (lego land) vie and jostle for your patronage. They could have learned their craft from the 1876 classic of Tom Sawyer's fence painting paradigm. It begins and ends with Tom convincing his friends that whitewashing a fence is a fun, rewarding and desirable pastime:

Say — I'm going in a-swimming, I am. Don't you wish you could? But of course you'd druther WORK — wouldn't you? Course you would!" Tom contemplated the boy a bit, and said: "What do you call work?" "Why, ain't THAT work?" . . . "Oh come, now, you don't mean to let on that you LIKE it?" . . . "Like it? Well, I don't see why I oughtn't to like it.

Does a boy get a chance to whitewash a fence every day?
"That put the thing in a new light. Tom gave up the brush
with reluctance in his face, but alacrity in his heart. ...And
while the [boy who had pretended he was] late steamer Big
Missouri worked and sweated in the sun, the retired artist sat
on a barrel in the shade close by, dangled his legs, munched
his apple, and planned the slaughter of more innocents.
There was no lack of material; boys happened along every
little while; they came to jeer, but remained to whitewash."⁷⁷



36. Darren McGinn
Leopold Development, display homes, 2010
Digital photograph

With Tom in mind, I have been visiting these display home precincts. I have been eavesdropping on the conversations that go on between the real estate agent and the prospective new home owner. The usual sales banter goes along the line of "...yes we can arrange you finance, of around three or four hundred thousand dollars. You can have house A, B, C or D straight off the plan and you get to choose your doorknobs".

⁷⁷ Mark Twain, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, American Publishing Company, 1876, Chapter 2.

I live in a dark and dingy unrenovated Californian Bungalow in an old and established inner city suburb, a great location within walking distance to all amenities. When I go into display homes I am initially taken by how clean, modern and light-filled they are. You enter and there is light and warmth and you think wow, maybe these homes aren't that bad after all? But when you go out into the miniscule yard that a reality check is made, there isn't a back or front yard and usually no side access, they really squeeze them in. Your vista is a sea of unbroken 'Legoland' monochrome rooftops.



37. Darren McGinn
Urban Engulfment on the Bellarine, 2010
Photograph

Suburban resident Caroline Mulhall, and listener to ABC's 'By Design', wrote the following response to an interview between Alan Saunders, 'By Design' presenter and guest Tony Hall, Adjunct Professor, Urban Research, from Griffith University about the loss of the backyard:

I have been increasingly saddened and dismayed at the shrinking building block, with its ever larger house and absolutely no backyard. Last year on Christmas morning I drove to the nursing home to bring my husband home for the day. On the way back it was about 10.30am and I noticed that there were no children out playing with their new toys, no neighbourhood sharing of the joy of Santa's visit, there was not a soul anywhere to be seen all locked inside their houses in front of the television or the computer playing games. Many of us make our social relationships and connections through our children, meeting other parents through school or in the neighbourhood generally. This isolation in the new suburban home has created a lack of community and can only point to a diminished socialisation of our population, how very, very sad.⁷⁸

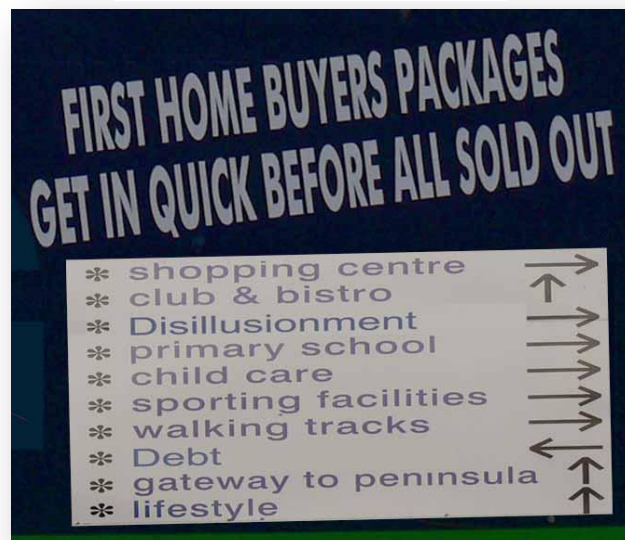
Instead of starting with a small house that you expand as you get a better job, people are starting off with the same house that their parents finished with; a \$400,000 to \$800,000 mortgage is common. The whole suburban experience is inextricably linked to fiscal and emotional economies. There's no capacity to build local communities that in themselves create employment options, and therefore as suburbia spreads we also get bigger and bigger metropolises.

I assembled a faux real-estate advertisement billboard and named the subdivision *Ubiquitous Grove*. If you decide upon Ubiquitous Grove, you will get: a shopping centre, a club bistro, disillusionment, primary school, child care, library, sporting facilities, walk tracks, some debt, gateway to the Peninsula and a lifestyle. A lifestyle of work.

⁷⁸ABC Radio National, By Design, Listeners' Letters, Wednesday, 13/10/2010.



38. Darren McGinn
Ubiquitous Grove, 2009
 Digitally altered photograph



39. Detail of *Ubiquitous Grove*

If everyone is at work and not home, nascent communities will suffer. No one is around to gossip over the back fence, keep an eye on the neighbour's place or to go to sporting events. You need to have time to 'be around'. We are creating non-places, dormitory stop-overs. For instance, my friend Maureen

lives in the 'satellite' suburb of Teesdale, situated approximately 84 kilometres from Melbourne and 65 kilometres from Geelong: there is nothing much there.

WELCOME TO TEESDALE 3328

- Distance from Melbourne CBD: 84km (52.4 miles)
- Approximate size for this postcode: 160.1 km²
- Surrounding suburbs: Lethbridge(3332), Bannockburn(3331), Shelford(3329), Inverleigh(3321)
- Total of population in this postcode in year 2006 : 1462 people
- Average age persons in 2006 was: 38 years old
- Most people in Teesdale were born in Australia
- Ancestors were mostly from: Australia
- Industry of occupation is mostly: Technicians & trades workers
- Median house price (2009): \$312,000⁷⁹

'Teesdalian' have nicknamed their suburb: 'bed and breakfast'. What is the point in owning your own home if you are never there? (Refer to appendix 1. for further statistical information in relation to Australians' demographic aspirations).

Since McAuliffe's critique *Art and Suburbia* was first published in 1996 there has been a quantum explosion of rural subdivisions and regional suburban developments. I do not believe that these new 'Gated Estates' are reflective of the suburbs they have preceded. Would or could artists such as Arkley find the 'source of difference' in these very new enclaves? How they will evolve and what they will offer up to the Australian culture is anyone's guess. But they are suggestive of a national epidemic of epic proportion. In Tim Winton's 2001 novel *Dirt Music*, as the characters Georgie and Fox come up to the outskirts of Perth:

⁷⁹ Welcome to Teasdale (3328), Available from <myboot.com.au >, Victoria, [Accessed: 22/8/2010].

Pillars of dust rose behind ‘dozers’ and graders scraping out another subdivision. The perimeter walls were already up as were the limestone plinths at the sweeping entry. TUSCAN RISE. Beyond it stretched the treeless plain of terracotta roof tiles.⁸⁰

Do, or would, these penitentiary style suburban enclaves resonate with the same sense of subtlety, nuance and sense of difference that the older suburbs did; or will they just epitomise a ubiquitous sameness?

The suburb, despite its treacheries, is also a humane creation. Because its truthfulness is freeing, and in its cracked veneers, as Darryl Kerrigan in *The Castle* would say, there is real ‘serenity’ to be found. What the great suburban critics do is expose our humanity with all its posturing and weaknesses. And there is something gut-twisting, sad, funny and weirdly beautiful in seeing ourselves so clearly.⁸¹

Chronologically, my research has focused on the last fifteen years of suburban development, 1996 until now, 2010, a decade and a half from where McAuliffe and Arkley left off. They were looking at pre-established suburbs; artists like Danko found them alienating; other artists were portraying them as places of beauty and subtle nuance.

A similar insight might apply to the new suburbs. The conclusion, if there can be one for this type of visual research, is that the new suburbs are in a state of transition; they are embryonic. For example, there is a new estate in Bell Park, a suburb of Geelong, where recently my daughter Molly did a ‘sleep over’ at a girlfriend’s place. When I went to pick her up, I drove into an environment that captured exactly what I dislike about the new suburbs; the whole estate

⁸⁰ Tim Winton, *Dirt Music*, Picador, Pan Macmillan, Sydney, 2001, p. 75.

⁸¹ Annie Stevens, ‘The write stuff of suburbia’, *The Age* A2, 10/4/2010, p. 20.

looked desolate and unoccupied. Molly explained to me that this indeed was not the case. The estate was populated by a huge and extended Croatian community, and her friend was a member of this community. I still believe its aesthetic had a lot to be desired – the large community was not in evidence.

I began this chapter by contending that the suburbs have provided the central theme, subject matter, genre, style, and ideological sympathy for many Australian artists. The past decade has seen a continuance of contemporary artists looking into their own suburban backyards as a source of reflection and review. The suburbs therefore must be more than a place of selfish pettiness and arrested development. The curious and creative nature of artists resists complacent thinking and views the suburbs as something more than a place of stagnation, but a place of enormous sociological potential.



40. Darren McGinn
Hoppers Crossing, 2007
Digital photograph

CHAPTER 6: SPIRIT OF PLACE AND LOCATION:

Examples of urban coastal change that threatens local distinctiveness.

In this chapter I propose to look at the specific examples of Binalong Bay, Tasmania and Point Lonsdale, Victoria, to examine the effects of the urbanization of coastal regions.

As I outlined in the 'Introduction', I am interested in how the built environment defines our personal identities within a community; how we see ourselves in the places where we live. I am a constant surfer, and recreational fisherman, living on the Bellarine Peninsula near Geelong. I feel I grew up here, and was always much more interested in the beach environment. I started noticing and documenting objects such as the tall, obsolete timber sea channel markers, and realised they were an important part of local folklore, they helped give meaning to this place.

In the last five years my focus has moved inland, to the changing folklore of the places where people live. I am critical of encroachment, of suburban development, into rural areas and villages, where the 'seachange' phenomenon has led to a 'hollowing out' of communities. According to 2006 Census data, the Bellarine Region and its immediate neighbour - the Surf Coast - are fast becoming ghost towns of empty houses and fractured populations.⁸² More than half the homes within Great Ocean Road townships are not permanently occupied, and the figure drops to just 27 per cent in Lorne.⁸³ Surf Coast Shire Councillor Beth Davidson, member of the National Sea Change Taskforce, has expressed concern about the long-term effects of this seachange phenomenon on communities.

When people don't live in the town full-time, they don't join the local clubs, they don't volunteer in local organisations, so what you get is a 'hollowing out'.

⁸² Rebecca Tucker, 'Coastal hubs becoming ghost towns', *Geelong Advertiser*, 16/6/2007, p. 5.

⁸³ *ibid.*

...We've got one section of the community which can't afford to get into the market and another section which doesn't live in the community.⁸⁴

Cr Davidson pointed out that multiple home ownership among members of one population group was contrasted against the lack of housing affordability in another sector. The outcome is a parasitic and economically segregated community.

Carmel Wallace in her thesis 'Developing a Relationship with Place: Art in the Context of Bioregional Theory and Practice', emphasises the importance of historical relationships with place in coastal communities. Wallace describes a strand of contemporary art that consciously sets out to comment on particular localities' attachment to place. She cites the Common Ground movement, established in England in 1983, as a well-documented example of art used to increase people's awareness and knowledge of local distinctiveness on a number of levels.⁸⁵

...with the two main objectives: to promote the importance of our local places, local distinctiveness and our links with the past and to explore the emotional value these things have for us by forging practical and philosophical links between the arts and the conservation of nature and landscape.⁸⁶

Wallace explains that at the heart of this project was the belief that, by celebrating and working with local environments, people from all walks of life

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁸⁵ Carmel Wallace, 'Developing a Relationship with Place: Art in the Context of Bioregional Theory and Practice', PhD thesis, held at Deakin University, Geelong, 1998, p.24.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

could make a difference.⁸⁷ This could be achieved largely through the promotion of cultural heritage and a revitalisation of the links between nature, landscape and the arts. In its concentration on the importance of home places, the Common Ground movement is in sympathy with the basic tenets of bioregional thinking. My research has revealed that many coastal townships I have visited and others that are familiar to me have lost their distinctiveness; it has been supplanted by a parasitical symbiosis, between the remaining long-term inhabitants and the new chums.

I have used Binalong Bay, Tasmania and Point Lonsdale, Victoria as case studies to explain this phenomenon. There are many parallels between Tasmania's north east coast villages and Victoria's coastal villages. A paradigm of this parallel is Binalong Bay and Point Lonsdale. The working class people from both areas still work in the remnants of historical industries such as fishing; now to a large extent the long term villagers work in new service industries that cater to tourism and 'holiday home' maintenance.

Located ten kilometres north-east of St Helens, Binalong Bay is a holiday and retirement town with a restaurant/café and food store. The Bay of Fires begins here and stretches north for thirty five kilometres to Eddystone Lighthouse. St Helens itself is a picturesque fishing port situated on the shores of Georges Bay. It is the largest town on the east coast and the hub for two major touring routes. St Helens is 'booming' - there are cafes, restaurants and delis. The town's current economy is based on fishing, timber and tourism. It is one of Tasmania's busiest fishing ports, especially for crayfish, scale fish and abalone.

Point Lonsdale is also a traditional retirement town for wealthy Western district graziers. The retirement base has now been extended to include the city's nouveau rich (old and new money).

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

Both Binalong Bay and Point Lonsdale host plenty of prestige building construction and land development projects. Huge, ultra modern, architect designed, 'chic' weekenders, stand over, overshadow and eclipse the remnant fibro shacks into past tense. It's obvious that the original villagers are being pushed out; creating an economically segregated community. This segregation has a peculiar resonance; both are host for one another. There is a parasitical symbiosis emerging; the new semi-occupied homes need routine maintenance. As historical industries shrink or disappear, the original villagers need new vocations if they wish to stay in their ancestral place. The irony is that the new locals are already becoming territorial and parochial; it doesn't take long for the new guard to feel at home.

Both Binalong Bay and Point Lonsdale have residential developments going on everywhere. The moneyed, national, cultural elite have well and truly got their 'claws' into most coastal villages. There is a visual jostle going on between fibro shacks, caravans and the architect designed weekenders. The demise of the traditional suburban stud frame, hip and valley home symbolises the type of change that is particularly evident in these coastal areas.

The new transient residents/life 'stylers', come real estate investors, consist proportionately of Tasmanians and people from interstate. The local economy includes the service industry sector. A local business woman, the owner and operator of D's Homecare and Maintenance in Binalong Bay, maintains that a lot of the big holiday homes are investment properties rented out to the tourist industry. I enquired as to who was buying investment real estate in the area, and I was surprised when she explained they were people from St Kilda, Melbourne and Geelong. 'D' said real estate prices peaked several years ago and the inflated prices have forced many local residents out of the market. Like many of the locals 'D' can 'lend her hand' to many trades when it comes to making a living in her home town. As well as home care and maintenance she is a professional skin diver and holds a crayfish and abalone licence. She works hard and has an investment property in the nearby township of Scamander.

I have personal links and a detailed knowledge of the Victorian Bellarine coastal region. This project has allowed me to understand in more detail the processes of change which have been and are taking place in this local environment, and the impact of these changes on the visual quality of the area.

Part of my research has been to establish and archive an extensive bank of photographic documentation of the increasing surge of building developments these coastal communities, have had to endure.



41. Darren McGinn
Binalong Bay, 2009
Digital Photograph



42. Darren McGinn
Three Aspects of Binalong Bay, the old and new, 2008
Digital Photographs



SUMMARY:

Having a methodology to allow us to better integrate across community, environment and landscape has been central to this research. I have approached this research project as both an artist and an archivist. I focused on two predominant suburban icons: the hip and valley suburban home and the caravan. Through these two icons I have endeavoured to visualize the impact change is bringing to the Australian coastal landscape by creating sculptural works that comment on the effects of urban development (particularly on my local region) and by digital photography, documenting change as it occurs.

Underpinning the research is my long-standing relationship with the Victorian Bellarine region. My personal links to the Bellarine region and my understanding of the surrounding area provided an insightful background to the processes of change which are taking place in the local environment. More broadly, my research investigated the rapid transformation of coastal townships caused by regional suburban development. The studio research and exegesis explored what it is that defines place (beyond its physical characteristics), the similarities and differences between a 'type' of place (in this case, coastal regions), and how established communities may retain a sense of place despite the threat posed by ubiquitous, characterless housing developments (which I have called 'non-places').

For the purpose of the exegesis, the term 'non-place' was used to define the new suburbs as places of transition, in that they are half built and only partially established. They are the new suburbs on the periphery of our coast as well as on the edges of our cities and along the arterial routes that speed from the urban into the rural. These are the dormant places whose surfaces are yet to bear the markings of modern times, and to which memory is yet to cling. I have explored what their future potential purpose may be, other than to disperse people by means of a vehicle.

Traditionally, communities grew organically; they did not simply appear. Communities and their infrastructure were allowed to evolve. These days, we seem to impose preformed and pre-digested urban spaces, with no chance for people to improvise along the way. However a home is still a place for working, resting, sharing, healing and dreaming; some things haven't changed that much, but other things have. When I grew up we had two and three bedroom homes on a reasonably large block of ground and you rode your pushbike or walked to school, within a fairly safe community. Everything suggests that the more people you have on the street, the safer the community is, but the moment you build walls and stay behind them, there is nobody visibly looking after things. But now we are building four and five bedroom homes on smaller blocks of ground, with very little public space, kids are driven to school, few walks, and children rarely ride pushbikes to school. So the fabric of the neighbourhood breaks down, and people have to travel longer distances as these developments are often on the fringes of urban areas.

Both the exegesis and studio outcomes respond to the misanthropic condition of the outlying prefabricated suburb, and the 'gated estates' that seem to barricade the residents in homes that aren't anywhere. They only approximate an idea of something else, somewhere else.

Throughout its entirety the studio research and exegesis questions our impulse to 'flat pack' or 'pre-design' our destiny. For living communities to thrive there are some basic priorities that need to be considered. A space needs to be distinctive; this is something designers and real estate agents struggle to predict. I have argued that what is needed in such an over-designed, over-planned and over-regulated arena is a place called 'the anon', a place where people can engage in their own nascent ideas other than those pre-planned or pre-designed for them. In essence, a place for residents to form a community; residents will create their own story and want to find their own way of living together. Arcadian perceptions often change; such is the flux and fission of a community. Infrastructure follows development, it does not precede it.

I have argued that because we are social creatures, we like to live together and interact with other people. We are constantly enmeshed in an internal struggle between the individual and the herd. We want to do the right thing, but we're tempted and torn. This is an inextricable part of the tension of the new suburbs. We want to live together and we want vibrant places. I have concluded that our peripheral, ever-expanding McMansion suburbs are not the answer to the new millennium's 'Great Australian Dream'. There is a never-ending debate going on about the high cost of housing and too many cars. As consequence, over the past couple of years there glossy planning reports have been published about solving these problems, full of photos of happy workers and families in what are described as 'strong vibrant communities' of the future.⁸⁸ The South East Queensland Regional Plan, the 'Melbourne at Five Million', the South Australia 'Planning the Adelaide We All Want', and in Sydney, 'The City of Cities' Plan'⁸⁹ are examples of the titled reports.

As a partial answer to the issues of rapid expansion and suburban sprawl perhaps more Australians could live in apartments. It might sound foreign to my generation, who grew up watching TV shows like *My Three Sons* and *The Brady Bunch*, whose lives were portrayed from their suburban homes. But my children's generation are watching 'sit-coms' where invariably the families live in apartments. I believe apartment dwelling will eventually happen here, but for the moment it is not easy to persuade the residents of established, leafy streets and heritage homes in quiet neighbourhoods to agree and accept plans for five storey apartment blocks in their 'back yard'.

If Australian society is to successfully tackle issues related to social isolation in suburbia, a proportion of the solution is embedded in enhancing established suburbs and inner city residential area's 'liveability' by ensuring a diverse

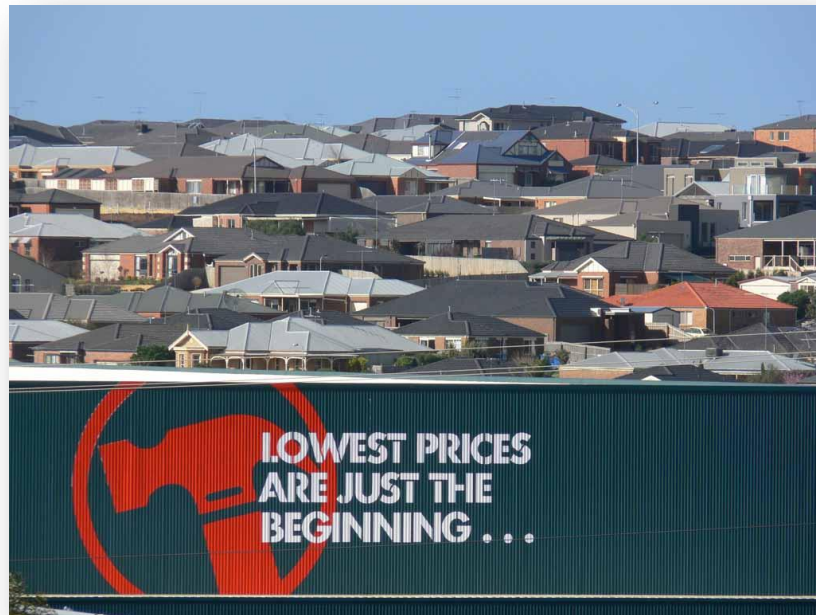
⁸⁸ ABC Radio National, Background Briefing, Housing for Millions, Ian Townsend, 10/01/2010.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

choice for an ageing and changing population, close to services, whilst at the same time, protecting the character of our suburbs and communities.

The studio research is a visual response to the new suburb's lack of imagination and the banal, repetitive architecture it seems to offer perspective residents. The research has supported my contention that the current method of developing suburban expansion is unsustainable; not only is it unsustainable on an environmental and sociological level, it is also an aesthetic indictment. I conclude that on the surface these new, outlying Australian suburbs are visually unsightly.

It was not the intention of this exegesis to be bipartisan and simply observe the inevitable unfolding of suburbia. I have studied both sides of the argument. The conclusion I have drawn is that some aspects of the new suburbs are worth applauding, and some aspects of suburban development should certainly be condemned and criticised. *Lowest Prices Are Just The Beginning...* is photo documentation of suburban development in an outer suburb of Geelong, Waurn Ponds. My anecdotal research confirms that there are plenty of people who live there who like it. The image below was taken from the Deakin University grounds, located on the opposite side of the Princes Highway. It is not photo-shopped, it is straight off the camera, and is visual confirmation that 'Lowest Prices Are Just The Beginning', the beginning of unsustainable building practice, standards of living and the death of community. Place is becoming dissolved by the developments of the modern world and we are losing distinct places and places of distinction.



43. Darren McGinn
Lowest Prices Are Just The Beginning ..., 2008
Digital photograph

Whilst the research conclusions may appear to be an indictment of the ‘terrible world’ in which we live, in the end I have argued for a more hopeful vision despite my initial alignment with Robyn Boyd, in Chapter Two. My hopeful vision perceives the best suburban environment as one crafted for children, families and the development of social intercourse and play. The suburbs could be a place of enormous potential.

The major subtext to the studio research and exegesis has dealt with issues of identity, its personal and communal importance, and its potential loss as the urban sprawl engulfs our coastal regions. Theoretical areas such as the exploration of sociological, social discourse and environmental aspects of suburban life have formed the nexus of the research. With regard to my own research within and around Queenscliff and Point Lonsdale, I was keen to ascertain whether or not a backdrop of bioregional consciousness was necessary to fully inform the studio research. I believe both Davies’s and Wallace’s Bioregional approach did resonate and inform my research direction.

The studio research and exegesis sought to address a culture that is seemingly unstoppable. As explained in the introduction, I would also conclude that contemporary suburban culture is threatening the regional distinctiveness of the culture of the beach. The ‘quantum explosion’ of coastal subdivisions and regional suburban developments (Appendix 1)⁹⁰ over the past decade has seen many Australian coastal townships undergoing rapid and radical transformations. Identification and recording of this visual change that has the potential to undermine the empathetic relationship communities have developed historically with their chosen coastal regions, was a primary research focus and was developed throughout the studio research and the chapters of the exegesis.

The preliminary research developed an initial body of work which used found objects, processes of visual documentation and a commitment to the worth of traditional crafts, to build a series of symbolic references to change. The preceding studio research revealed a shift from the sea to the sea-side and a particular interest in the gated enclaves of the new suburbia and the place of the caravan in Australian culture.

The exegesis concluded the caravan to be a symbol of the Australian annual holiday and represented the translocation of the suburban lifestyle to regional centres. The new mobile holiday home is symbolic of suburban affluence. This perception changes as the vehicle ages until it becomes a poor quality permanent home for the economically dispossessed. Now derelict or abandoned, the caravans in my digital photographs and sculptural installations represent the hundreds of thousands of people who live in caravan parks across Australia. This temporary – or often long-term – form of accommodation is representative of people who live one step away from homelessness. Finally, the caravan translated itself as a motif of transitory marginal existence. The caravan is at once a vehicle and a home, and much like the new suburbs: ‘a

⁹⁰ Bernard Salt, *op cit*, p. 65.

state in-between state', without a community or status. It alludes to a transitory time of displacement in contemporary life.

This research project has been achieved through the development and subsequent culmination of a body of sculptural installations that provoke discussion concerning interesting social polarities such as tradition/innovation, subsistence/affluence, past/present and permanence/change.

A primary aim of the thesis was to provide a clear contextualisation and an understanding of the importance of location. The research explored the significance of Australian coastal regions and our changing relationship with these locations as they become increasingly urbanised. On a sociological level, the differences between middle-class and working-class Australian culture was theoretically and visually explored. A major research outcome was the evidence of economically segregated communities. This in turn raised the issue of identity, its personal and communal importance and its potential loss as we become increasingly urbanised.

A priority for this research project was to inform the community as to what a visual art investigation can achieve, by means of the final exhibition of the work that has been inspired by the themes of the research. When the audience perceives the familiar landscapes, and the issues they are confronting, rendered as sculptural installations, people start to think about where they live in a proactive manner.

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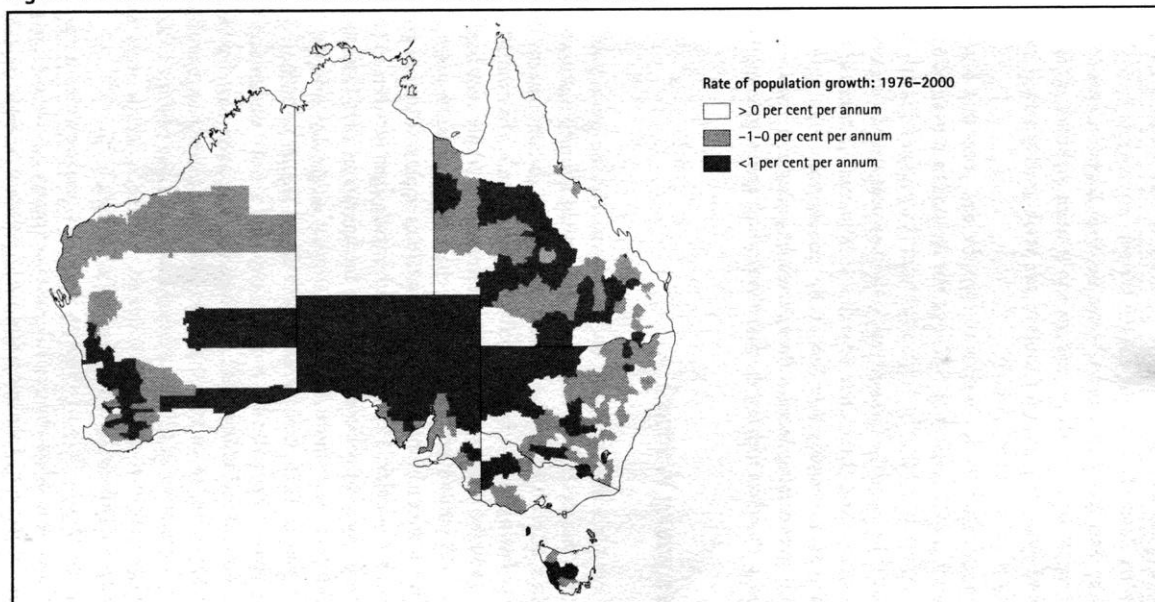
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APPENDIX: 1

Figure 7: Australians shiftin' and shufflin' around their continent



This map shows the rate of population growth and decline across the Australian continent between 1976 and 2000. The areas shaded black recorded population loss over this period of a rate of more than 1 per cent per year. The areas shaded white recorded some form of growth. We, as a nation, are moving *from* the black areas *to* the white areas.

⁹¹ Source: Bernard Salt, The Big Shift, Hardi Grant Books, Melbourne, 2004, p. 65.

APPENDIX: 2

Statistics on Australians' demographic aspirations from The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey, Annual Report, 2009.

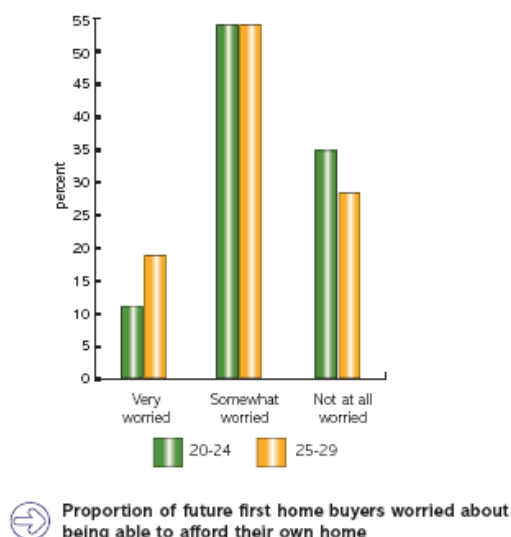
The majority of movers are young people (aged 25-34 years) who, on average, stay in the same place for approximately 4 years. Conversely, those aged 65 years or older reported living in the same place for an average of 20 years. Generally, the average time people spend at the one address is 10 years.⁹²

Respondents were also asked about the reasons for moving house. In just over half the cases, housing reasons were given for the move (e.g., to get a better or larger place). Family or personal reasons were cited as reasons in a further one-third of moves, job or education reasons in another one-sixth, and neighbourhood reasons in about 7 per cent of cases.⁹³

Is the great Australian dream of owning our own home becoming unattainable?

The results from the 2004 *Living in Australia* study show that nearly half of the people aged 25 to 29 had bought their first home. One in seven aged 20 to 24 had also bought their first home.

The vast majority aged 20 to 29 who had not yet bought their own home said they intended to do so in the future. The graph below shows that over two thirds of this group were either somewhat or very worried about being able to afford their own home when the time came.



⁹² The University of Melbourne., The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey, Annual Report, 2009.

⁹³ *ibid.*

What is important to us changes with time

In 2004, the *Living in Australia* study asked people aged 15 to 29 to say how important various things were in their lives now and how important those things would be to them when they were 35.

The following table shows the top five important areas and how this changes with age.

 Top five most important things by age				
	15-19	20-24	25-29	At 35
1	Keeping fit	Keeping fit	Keeping fit	Saving and investing
2	Getting more education	Having a successful career	Saving and investing	Having a successful career
3	Having lots of friends	Getting more training to improve job skills	Living with someone in a long-term relationship	Keeping fit
4	Getting more training to improve job skills	Saving and investing	Having a successful career	Living with someone in a long-term relationship
5	Sports and hobbies	Sports and hobbies	Making a lot of money	Making a lot of money

APPENDIX: 3.

Works from this research have been published in the following exhibitions:

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- | | |
|------|---|
| 2008 | CHANGING PLACES, Museum of Objects, Academy of the Arts, University of Tasmania. |
| 2008 | PLACE VERSUS NON-PLACE, Geelong Gallery. As part of the Shell Arts – Geelong Region Artist Program. |

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- | | |
|------|--|
| 2010 | 27 th Gold Coast International Ceramic Art Award, Gold Coast City Art Gallery, Gold Coast Arts Centre, Qld. |
| 2010 | The Toorak Village Sculpture Exhibition, Toorak. |
| 2010 | Williamstown Festival Contemporary Art Prize, The Substation Arts Centre Newport. |
| 2010 | DIVERTISMENT, collaborative sculpture installations with Dr Christopher Headley, Craft Victoria, Melbourne. (<i>Two independent installations & two collaborations</i>). |
| 2009 | Woollahra Small Sculpture Prize 2009. Woollahra Council Chambers. |
| 2009 | 2009 Williamstown Festival Contemporary Art Prize, The Substation Arts Centre, Newport. |
| 2009 | 2009 The Inaugural Manningham Victorian Ceramic Award, Manningham Gallery. |
| 2008 | Williamstown Festival, Tattersall's Contemporary Art Prize, The Substation Arts Centre, Newport. |
| 2008 | CRYPTOZOOLOGY, Toyota Community Spirit Gallery, Toyota Corporate Headquarters, Port Melbourne. |
| 2007 | THE GARDEN PATH, Toyota Community Spirit Gallery, Toyota Corporate Headquarters, Port Melbourne. |
| 2007 | Williamstown Festival Contemporary Art Prize, The Substation Arts Centre, Newport. |
| 2007 | WORKS ON WATER a four person exhibition, a part of the Herring Island Summer Arts Festival. |
| 2006 | 25 th Gold Coast International Ceramic Art Award, Gold Coast City Art Gallery, Gold Coast Arts Centre, Qld. |
| 2006 | SYMBIOTICS, Toyota Community Spirit Gallery. Toyota Corporate Headquarters, Port Melbourne. |